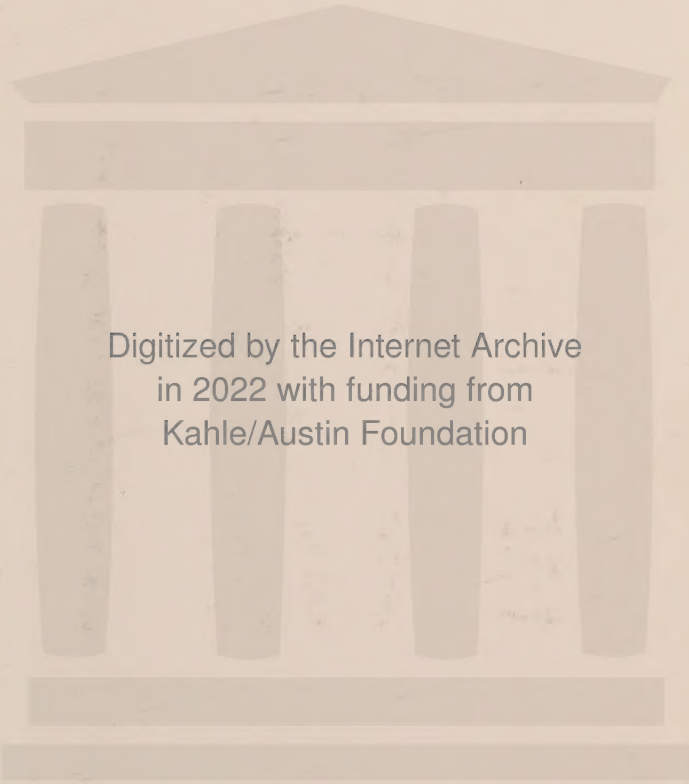




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THE PROBLEMS OF
THE SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE
SHAKESPEARE CANON, PROCEEDING
ON THE PROBLEM OF "TITUS AN-
DRONICUS."

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON : PART I.

- I. THE ORIGATION OF "HENRY V."
- II. THE ORIGATION OF "JULIUS CÆSAR."
- III. THE AUTHORSHIP OF "RICHARD III."

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON : PART II.

- I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF "THE TWO GENTLE-
MEN OF VERONA."
- II. THE AUTHORSHIP OF "RICHARD II."
- III. THE AUTHORSHIP OF "THE COMEDY OF
ERRORS."
- IV. THE PROBLEM OF "MEASURE FOR
MEASURE."

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON : PART III.

- I. THE "ACCEPTANCE" OF "SHAKESPEARE."
- II. "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."
- III. "ROMEO AND JULIET."

THE PROBLEM OF "HAMLET."

"HAMLET" ONCE MORE.

THE PROBLEM OF "THE MERRY WIVES OF
WINDSOR."

CROCE AS SHAKESPEAREAN CRITIC.

SHAKESPEARE AND CHAPMAN.

MONTAIGNE AND SHAKESPEARE.

THE BACONIAN HERESY : A CONFUTATION.

ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE.

IN PREPARATION

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON : PART IV.

THE "HENRY VI" PLAYS.

THE PROBLEMS
OF THE
SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

BY

J. M. ROBERTSON

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PREFACE

THIS book is not an attempt to add a new theory of the Sonnets to the large stock already on record, and of late almost annually added to. It attempts, by collating all the competing theories with each other and with the data, to indicate the direction in which critical research may most profitably proceed.

For such research two sorts of preparation may be suggested. First and foremost, the Sonnets should be read, on the one hand, with an awakened literary sense, detached from the academic presupposition that we must expect to find solely Shakespearean matter in a collection ascribed to Shakespeare by a piratical publisher; but, on the other hand, with a vigilant concern for concrete literary tests as against purely subjective reactions, ethical or other. And this double vigilance is not an easy matter, inasmuch as the sonnet-form, imposing the end-stopped rhythm, promotes a much closer approach to uniformity of technique than that imposed on Shakespeare and his corrivals by blank-verse.

The second discipline is a general approximation, on the historic side, to that rectitude of inference dictated to men of science by the high standards of their calling, and to accountants by the economic conditions of theirs. The simple procedure of an accountant unravelling the finance of an elastically managed group of companies fallen into bankruptcy would have limited greatly the lawless activities alike of Sonnet theorists and of orthodox commentators in the past, had it occurred to them to follow such a

PREFACE

model. Unfortunately, while the accountant is held to a straight course alike by concrete law and by economic need, the average sonnet theorist has had no discipline whatever; and the academic persons who justly seek to discourage him are apt to fail of influence by their apparent disinclination to find out anything about the problems which excite him. This attitude is, of course, misleading. The *paralysis academica* is really a *paralysis agitans*; and the academic repressor perhaps takes as much pains to establish untenable old positions as the theorist takes to establish new ones.

In point of fact, the orthodox editors have made three ill-warranted assumptions which they have never tested: (1) that all (or at least some 150) of the Sonnets in the Quarto are really penned by Shakespeare; (2) that 126 are addressed to a man; and (3) that these must all refer to one man—whether Southampton, Pembroke, or an untraced “Mr. W. H.” And these three very unlikely theories they have founded on one fantastic phrase by a flighty publisher. The rival theories are certainly no better founded; but these, at least, cry aloud for scrutiny.

The maxim, “Patience, and shuffle the cards,” does not quite fit the case. In this game we rather want to have all the cards on the table, a course rarely taken in these inquiries. Once more, the calculus of the possibilities and probabilities is not easy, seeing that even if we reach a working documentary hypothesis we have still to face the literary and psychological enigmas. That these are *not* to be fully solved on the existing data is the conclusion so far reached in the present investigation.

Signor Croce has appeared to suggest that our final estimate of Shakespeare is best to be reached by not taking much trouble about ascertaining what he really wrote, and this just because the trouble is so troublesome. To anyone who finds comfort in that view this

PREFACE

volume will be disappointing. It assumes not merely that pains must be taken over all the main Shakespeare problems, but that conclusions reached without pains-taking are likely to be of little critical value.

Still, the path of inquiry is not so thorny or so steep that well-meaning readers need be deterred. Many of the theorists have taken great pains over their problems; and even conservative editors must have taken pains to convince themselves of the inexpediency of getting off the fence. To follow fairly the labours of some recent framers of new solutions is to be abashed over any tendency to make light of them. After all, even to learn to read Shakespeare in general with right understanding involves labour, whatever some clever people may think. And perhaps a good many of us may still agree that it is well worth our while to take trouble over Shakespeare; with perhaps some reservations about the "esoteric" and other oracular pronouncements which present the convictions of consciously gifted persons who, offering no arguments, presumably invite none.

If, finally, it be asked what is to be gained from a critical analysis which confessedly leaves central enigmas unsolved, it may suffice to answer that at least we have found reasons for regarding a large number of Sonnets as non-Shakespearean, and a number more as having had a different destination from that commonly inferred, thus *pro tanto* altering our conception of Shakespeare for the better.

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PART I
THE LITERATURE

PROBLEMS OF THE SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

PART I.—THE LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

SONNET PROBLEMS: THEIR EMERGENCE

FOR most readers of Shakespeare, it would seem, the critical problems latterly set up by the composition of his works are practically restricted to those created by the Sonnets, which are, in fact, the least soluble. It may be that for that very reason they are found by many the most interesting. Probably, however, they alone suggest themselves to most readers, even of the more studious type, as actually obtrusive. For one reader who realises the multitude of difficulties as to the real authorship of much of the Folio, and grapples with these in a scientific fashion, there are three who are led aside, for awhile if not for life, by one or other of the "anti-Stratfordian" solutions,¹ not one of which meets the real difficulties at all, inasmuch as each does but fantastically suggest a new author for a mass of work which cannot be critically conceived as coming from the hand of any one author. Apart from these visionary solutions of a false problem, the majority of the inquirers who approach problems of authorship at all devote themselves to the very real, but very intractable, problems of the Sonnets.

¹ The last book of 'Notes on the Authorship of the Shakespeare Plays' (1923) turns out to be a simple *réchauffée* of the Baconian theory, with no attempt to meet either the rival "peer" theories or the case against all. And the author is LL.D. Another (1926) redevelops the revelation that Bacon was the son of Leicester and Elizabeth.

SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

The main explanation is, perhaps, that the problems of the authorship of the composite plays are still not widely recognised as actually existing. Even the knowledge that the HENRY VI plays are very doubtful, and that HENRY VIII has long been given up by most critics as largely the work of Fletcher, and that TIMON and TITUS and TROILUS and PERICLES are more or less widely questioned, will not persuade most people to think that there can be many more such problems in the Folio. Such suggestions they instinctively shun as "devastating" and "disintegrating." And thus problems which are more or less open to scientific solutions, testable by strict application of their own principles, are tranquilly ignored in favour of forensic disputes about the second-best bed, or discussions of the identity of the Dark Lady, or schemes of the proper sequence of the insequent Sonnets, or theories of their individual or general significance, whether as autobiographic or impersonal, or (but this much more rarely) of their actual authorship in detail.

Such debate has now continued for over a hundred years; and the last five have been among the busiest. Dowden, making his instructive survey in 1881,¹ indicated some sixty writers, propagating a multitude of more or less differing views. As he attempted no synthesis, there followed newly vigorous conflicts between the adherents of the Southampton and the Pembroke theories; and a long discussion over Mr. Thomas Tyler's identification (ed. of Sonnets, 1890, and in previous papers) of the Dark Lady as Mary Fitton, Maid of Honour to Elizabeth, and mistress of Pembroke—a figure who still flits fitfully across the scene. Still there was no agreement. In 1886 F. G. Fleay, who had been fairly flouted by Dowden

¹ In his second edition of the Sonnets, with an expanded Introduction. See also his tabulation of theories in his *Shakspeare : His Mind and Art*, 11th ed., ch. viii, p. 394.

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for the extravagances of an early essay (1875), made in his *Life of Shakespeare* the important suggestion that the "Mr. W. H." of the publisher's dedication had been William Hervey, who in 1597 became the third husband of Southampton's mother, and "may have been the original suggester to Shakespeare, as a friend of Lord Southampton, that he should write a series of sonnets to him recommending marriage in 1594." This noteworthy hypothesis was again embodied by Fleay in the *Excursus on the Sonnets* in his 'Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama' (1891), without apparently attracting the attention of the other critics;¹ and the Pembroke-Southampton battle proceeded on the old lines.

Fleay had vouched for the Southampton solution as "beyond doubt," dismissing the Pembroke theory as "finally disposed of"; and Professor Gollancz in his 'Temple' edition (1894) put forcibly the logical objections to the latter. But Fleay's own solution of the initials being ignored, the conflict went on. An able attack on the Southampton solution, in 1897, by William Archer,² who found new arguments for Tyler's theory as to Mary Fitton, elicited a rejoinder by Sidney Lee in 1898, in which the Pembroke solution was contemned with equal confidence, and, on the whole, with equal force, the resultant being a critical deadlock, since neither thesis effectively met its own difficulties, and the Pembrokian, in particular,

¹ Mrs. C. C. Stopes, in her valuable work on *Shakespeare's Environment* (1914, p. 149), writes that a key to the mystery of the dedication of the Sonnets lies "ready to hand in a place where no one before has looked for it"—that is, in the personal relation of Hervey to the Southampton family, which indicates him as "Mr. W. H." She refers to her article "Who is Mr. W. H.?" in the *Athenæum*, August 4, 1900. But Fleay, as above noted, had put forth the theory long before. Mrs. Stopes's advocacy of it, in the work cited and in her edition of the Sonnets (1904), has been almost as generally ignored as Fleay's was.

² *Fortnightly Review*, December, 1897.

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merely dismissed without dissolving the strong arguments for an early dating of the earlier sonnets. Lee, further, by identifying "Mr. W. H." as the mere obtainer of the MS. for the publisher, had invited the question, What warranty, then, is there for supposing all the Sonnets to be from one hand? and this question he never faced.

The situation was the more baffling inasmuch as Lee had taken up successively, with equal confidence, three positions, the Pembrokean, the Southamptonian, and the "impersonal," standing finally for the last view, with a resort to the Southampton connection as explaining Shakespeare's original resort to sonneteering; but never setting forth his reasons for abandoning, in turn, each of his former positions, which had been as unreservedly held, and which remained on lasting record. Such a situation invited flank attacks, and they were forthcoming.

That of George Wyndham, in his scholarly and charming edition of the Poems (1898), was gentle enough. His winning expatiation disclaimed any judicial decision on the "W. H." problem, as being one lying outside literary criticism proper, and as tending (p. 247) to preclude a truly æsthetic appreciation. But he indicated none the less a strong leaning to the Pembroke side of things, and committed himself, not very consistently, to a late date for the entire series, thus in effect supporting the Pembroke theory, to the detriment of his æsthetics. Nor did he ever recognise that there is any problem of authenticity in regard to any of the Sonnets. Like Tyler, he takes Sonnet 55 to be certainly Shakespeare's, and accordingly traceable for source to a passage in Meres, but says nothing of its detachability from every series, or of the "early" quality of many of the preceding Sonnets. Wyndham's chief contribution to the problem of chronology is his interesting investigation (p. 244 *seq.*),

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through astronomers, of the clue of "April" and "Saturn" in Sonnet 98, by which he gets for that Sonnet a date between 1602 and 1605. For the rest, he not only accepts as Shakespearean all the Sonnets, but holds that the Quarto order "can scarce be bettered" (p. 109), while urging at points the need for bettering it.

Of a very different temper is the exposition of Samuel Butler, in his edition of the Sonnets (1899). He rejects alike the Pembroke and the Southampton theories; insists that "W. H." must be taken as the "inspirer" of the Sonnets as a whole, without attempting to identify him beyond putting the probability that he was a William Hughes, a sea cook (with rival poets soliciting his favour); suggests that he was a fool as well as an odious knave; denies that he need be supposed to have been a man of rank or wealth; connects him, so far as possible, with every Sonnet, but frames a new order, dating them all between 1585 and 1588, thus making Shakespeare the forerunner of the sonnet-movement of the 'nineties; and embodies a comparatively new and highly unpleasant interpretation of the whole matter, refusing to conceive of any "impersonal" sonneteering on Shakespeare's part. The whole exposition is preluded by an acidulous exposure of the changes of view undergone up to that date by Sidney Lee on the problems of motivation and destination. Such were the occupations of Shakespeare-criticism at the end of the century.

Beyond a somewhat widespread leaning to the Mary Fitton theory, which had been skilfully set forth by Tyler, and supported by Archer, nobody could be said to have set up a new school, though Lee had made a considerable impression by his thesis that the Sonnets were in the main only literary exercises—a view widely held long before him. The clashing claims of Pembroke and Southampton to the enigmatic

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status of "begetter," the various possible identifications of "Mr. W. H." as not the recipient but the mere procurer or collector of the Sonnets (Fleay's theory being overlooked), continued to divide as in the past the suffrages of the studious.

CHAPTER II

NINETEENTH-CENTURY STUDY

It is worth while, with the help of the well-read Dowden, to trace in detail the course of speculation thus far. The main features of the debate, all along, had been the confident presentments of some four or five main solutions by theorists who saw none of the difficulties of their own, but were keenly alive to those of the others. But the deadlock was of gradual production. Nathan Drake, in 1817, had an apparently free field for his Southampton theory, now that readers had been prepared by Malone to see at least the majority of the Sonnets as addressed to a man. Very unfortunately, instead of making a close scrutiny of all the Sonnets singly, Drake and his sympathisers tended to promote the uncritical view of Malone, that the whole of the 126 Sonnets which constitute the bulk of the Quarto should be read as addressed to one man. The theory had not been put as without exceptions, but it tended to be adopted without exceptions, in mere reaction against the plainly false view previously prevailing, that the Sonnets in the mass are addressed to a woman.

1. The long survival of the old view, set up by Benson, the publisher-editor of the medley of sonnets and poems issued as Shakespeare's in 1640, and covered in Benson's compilation by falsifications of the text,¹ is proof of the dominion of a quite un-

¹ These, altering in some cases the sex of the addressee, have suggested to some that Benson, in asserting in his preface that Shakespeare had in his lifetime avouched the "purity" of the Sonnets, had references to some current censure of them. But though Benson might

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critical "taste" for a period of more than a century, in which the Sonnets were but little noticed. Lintott's reprint of the 1609 Quarto in 1709-10 was long followed by mere reprints of Benson. As late as 1771, the Dublin reprint of Johnson's edition¹ of the plays added a reprint of the Benson collection of 1640, with its falsified text, though Steevens had reprinted the Quarto in 1766, albeit with the opinion, expressed by him later, that the Sonnets were utterly worthless and unreadable. A mere attentive reversion (by Malone, in 1780) to the original Quarto text sufficed to dismiss Benson's figment, which seems to have been recommended (1) by a suspicion that to read the "male" Sonnets as such was to raise the most unpleasant issues; and (2) by the reasonable impression that a number even of the first 126 Sonnets are really addressed to one of the other sex.

2. But even while Nathan Drake's explanation (1817) of the first 126 Sonnets as largely though not wholly addressed to Southampton (a more judicial view than the later assumption that *all* were so addressed) was winning acceptance in the widening world of Shakespeare students, it was strenuously rejected by the younger James Boswell in the *Variorum*

have had such an idea, he probably meant merely to claim that Shakespeare, by letting Thorpe's Quarto pass current, had admitted the accuracy of the text—a proposition which certainly cannot stand.

¹ Samuel Butler (*The Sonnets of Shakespeare*, 1899, p. 14) asserts that Johnson in 1771 published as the thirteenth volume of his edition of the Plays "what professes to be Shakespeare's Poems, but is in reality only a reprint of Benson's medley, with the spelling modernised. No better proof of Johnson's indolence, and, one is tempted to add, of his unfitness to edit Shakespeare at all, can be found. . . ." This aspersion recoils on the critic. Johnson had nothing to do with the Dublin edition of 1771, which was one of the ordinary Dublin "piracies," and which gave four other prefaces as well as Johnson's, with Capell's introduction and notes from other critics. Johnson seems never to have expressed any opinion on the Sonnets or on the editing of them.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY STUDY

edition of 1821; and already the Pembroke theory was being generated. Mr. B. Heywood Bright had privately laid it before the Rev. Joseph Hunter in 1819; though he did not publicly announce it till 1832, when James Boaden began in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a series of articles, republished in book form in 1837, propounding the Pembroke and repelling the Southampton theory on the grounds commonly urged in our own time. Drake had not pretended to identify Southampton with "Mr. W. H.," thus giving the Pembroke party their chance to explain the initials.

3. While efforts were thus being made to find a personal solution for the problem, Dyce, already a leading authority on Elizabethan drama, published his 'Memoir of Shakespeare' (1832) with the Poems,¹ in which he took up Boswell's attitude. "I have long felt convinced," he wrote, "after repeated perusals of the Sonnets, that the greater number of them was composed in an assumed character, on different subjects, for the amusement of the author's intimate associates"; but he concedes that Nos. 110 and 111 may "have an individual application to the poet." This "unquantified" proposition has recurred frequently in various forms, but has never very successfully competed with the attempts to find a special recipient of Shakespeare's homage.

4. Coleridge, from whom more might have been expected, contributed little to the critical study of the Sonnets. In the Lectures on Shakespeare he does not deal with them, even in the section on "Shakespeare as a Poet generally"; and in the 'Table Talk' (1833), where he speaks of them as forming "in fact, a poem of so many stanzas of fourteen lines each," he commits himself (with an eye on the new Pembroke theory) to the position that *they* "could only have come from a man deeply in love, and in love with a woman";

¹ Pickering's Aldine edition of the British Poets.

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though he recognises that it was not uncommon for poets in the Elizabethan period to treat of male friendship in language "such as we could not now use except to women." Had he simply argued that a number of the first 126 Sonnets are probably addressed to a woman, he would have made an important point: by treating all as on that footing, and as forming a continuous poem, he merely darkened counsel. The problem is thus not faced by the chief critic of his time.

5. More discrimination had been shown by Mrs. Jameson in her paper 'On the Love of Shakspeare' in her compilation 'The Romance of Biography' (1829). From her came the first suggestion (i, 239) of "dramatic" Sonnets "addressed in Southampton's name to . . . Elizabeth Vernon"; but more important, perhaps, are her specifications of a female destination for a number of Sonnets in Part I. "That Lord Southampton," she writes, "is the subject of the first fifty-five Sonnets is sufficiently clear"—here missing possible applications of her own theory as to Elizabeth Vernon; but she takes as a description of the Circe of Part II the 99th Sonnet, finding nothing wrong with the style; and she takes as also addressed to "the" lady the 95th and 96th, and the 97th and the 90th. Nos. 110 and 111, she thinks, "are undoubtedly addressed to Lord Southampton"; but 71, she holds, "must have been addressed to a female."

She concludes with a *beau geste*: "I rejoice that the name of no woman is popularly identified with that of Shakspeare. He belongs to us all!—the creator of Desdemona and Juliet and Ophelia and Imogen and Viola and Constance and Cordelia and Rosalind and Portia was not the poet of one woman but the poet of WOMANKIND." But neither this nor the excellent critical work of the great bulk of her book on Shakespeare's women has availed to induce the apostolic

NINETEENTH-CENTURY STUDY

succession of editors to weigh her suggestions as to the female destination of a number of the Sonnets declared by Malone to be addressed to a male.

6. In 1838 appeared the work of Charles Armitage Brown, the friend of Keats, on 'Shakespeare's Autobiographical Poems,' in which the Sonnets are confidently accepted as wholly personal, and divided into a series of six poems in sonnet stanza, each ending with an appropriate envoy. This may be regarded as the first step in the attempt at analysis which is forced on students who see that the "W. H." problem is only a part of the whole. Though rightly insisting that the lyric value of the Sonnets is independent of the identity of "Mr. W. H.," Brown adopts the Pembroke theory on the view that a "Master William Herbert" to whom Sonnets had been addressed might fitly be indicated as "Mr. W. H." even when he had become an Earl. As we now know, Herbert was never "Master" but always "the Lord Herbert." But, apart from that issue, Brown brings no critical tests to bear on his problems. Describing himself as "one who, however much he has read, has studied nothing but Shakespeare for thirty years," he suggests that Shakespeare wrote the *VENUS* and the *LUCRECE* before coming to London, and yet offers no intelligible chronology for the opening set of Sonnets, taking them as addressed to Herbert (who first came to London in 1598), yet closely akin to the Poems of 1593-4.

It is interesting to note that Brown, while "not aware than an argument has been publicly attempted against the genuineness of the Sonnets," mentions that "many years ago it was urged to me in conversation, and it has since been told me (perhaps erroneously) that a disproof of their authenticity is in preparation." Against this he urges, along with better arguments, their publication, under Shakespeare's name, during

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his life, *uncontradicted by himself or any other person*—a plea obviously invalid. There is no recorded “contradiction” by Shakespeare of any of the false ascriptions to him of other men’s plays, because there was no channel for such record; though by chance we have Heywood’s account of Shakespeare’s displeasure over the frauds of the publisher of *THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM*.

It is scarcely worth while to comment on the allusion to the “frequent occurrence” in the Sonnets “of law phrases, which is observable in all his works, *and in no other author’s.*” Brown is not singly to be censured for a reckless figment that is still current among Shakespeareans who do not study the rest of the Elizabethan drama. His most original criticism is his verdict (p. 147) that, despite “many stanzas of wonderful beauty,” the subjects of the Sonnets “are uninteresting. The conceits and forced metaphors, which in his day seem to have been admired, may be forgiven by us; but the languid prolixity and monotony of cadence, pervading almost all the stanzas, are wearisome to modern readers.” Such critical detachment on the part of an admiring student, bent on proving Shakespeare’s presence throughout the Sonnets, promises a judicial procedure, but none emerges. Brown’s division of the series into six separate poems is as a whole quite arbitrary, seeing that in most of the grouped sets there are obvious breaks and new departures which call on his own principles for further grouping. He, in fact, admits that some will not compose with any group. And nothing is really gained by dividing the series, in the published order, into six poems of nearly equal length. A division into twelve or more sets of stanzas would have left the essential problems in the same unsolved state. Brown’s attempt to vindicate Shakespeare from any charge of flattery is perhaps the best considered part of his performance; but that too is inconclusive as

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regards the Sonnets. He shows sound judgment in denying (with Lamb and Coleridge) that Shakespeare had any share in *TITUS*; but on some biographical matters he was led astray by Collier's forgeries; and on others he shows himself ill-read.

7. Brown, however, had some influence in promoting the acceptance of the Pembroke theory. When Hallam in the following year accepted that as satisfactory (albeit declaring that it was impossible not to wish that Shakespeare had never written the Sonnets), saying nothing for the Southampton theory, the former might be said to have gained the lead. But that theory, adopted rather than vindicated by Brown, has all along involved grave difficulties which its champions have evaded. The existence of the "Will" Sonnets cannot carry the inference that all the Sonnets to a man are addressed to a "William." And if we are to grant that "Mr. W. H." is a likely dedicatory allusion, by a piratical but crafty publisher, to a nobleman who in his youth had always been known as "the (or my) Lord Herbert" and who in 1609 was the Earl of Pembroke, we cannot reasonably refuse to grant that the same publisher, for exactly the same kind of prudential reason, might disguise Southampton's initials, H. W., by reversing them. If it was advisable to mystify the public as to the identity of the Earl of Pembroke in such a matter, it was equally advisable to disguise the Earl of Southampton. And both considerations join to prompt the question (put by Minto solely as against the Southampton theory) why, with such serious need to mystify the public about the recipient of the Sonnets, he should have been pointed to in the dedication at all.

8. Might not "W. H." be a "begetter" in some other sense than "inspirer"? George Chalmers (1797) had argued this in connection with his quaintly insane theory that the Sonnets (and Spenser's *AMORETTI*)

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had been addressed to Queen Elizabeth—a desperate proposition engendered by his difficulty in extricating himself from the blunder he had made by endorsing at the outset the forgeries of William Henry Ireland, exposed by Malone. The Anglo-Saxon *begettan*, Chalmers boldly claimed, originally meant just *get, obtain*. His main theory effectively repelled inquiry on the minor at the time; but the latter was inevitably resurrected. Boswell, in particular, adopted it in the Variorum edition of 1821, in support of the further proposition that the Sonnets were wholly impersonal—“merely the effusions of [Shakespeare’s] fancy, written upon various topicks for the amusement of a private circle.”¹ And Boswell, like the rest, accepted as unchallengeable the assumption that the motley collection, vouched only by a piratical publisher and his jackal, must be wholly of Shakespeare’s writing.

It is almost surprising that not till 1873 was the suggestion openly made that W. H. may have been a mere printer’s error for W. S. This surmise, which had probably occurred to many, was publicly proclaimed in the last century only by Dr. Ingleby and Mr. E. A. Brae; but they do not seem to have lengthily debated it, perhaps perceiving the difficulty that it ostensibly makes the publisher wish for the author the immortality promised him by “our ever-living poet”—that is, apparently, the said author. There is, as it happens, an arguable way out, to the effect that immortality had been promised to Shakespeare by another “ever-living poet,” to wit, Marlowe; but the theory of a printer’s error has found no acceptance.

A standing difficulty for the holders of the Pembroke theory is the incompatibility of Herbert’s position at eighteen with the appeal to the youth in the Sonnets to save his house by marrying. Herbert had a brother living. Another and a vital crux is the impossibility

¹ Var. ed., xx, 220.

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of reconciling the theory with any dating of any of the Sonnets before 1598, when Lord Herbert came to London as a youth of eighteen. Critics standing at various points of view, including Dowden, have recognised in the early Sonnets of the series not only a youthful quality, but a series of striking verbal and phrasal coincidences with the diction and sentiment of the *VENUS AND ADONIS* and some of the early plays, as well as a highly noteworthy parallelism between Sonnet 26 and the dedication to the *LUCRECE*. But to adopt or seriously lean to the Pembroke theory appears to disable any man for the recognition of any force in that very reasonable argument. As it cancels the Pembroke theory in the main, it is looked at with a critically blind eye.

This unbalancing effect of the Pembroke solution takes a startling form in the case of the normally sober antiquary, Joseph Hunter, who in his 'New Illustrations' of Shakespeare (1845) not only declared himself convinced by Boaden and C. A. Brown that Lord Herbert was "Mr. W. H.," but seriously argued (i, 228) that Beatrice's pun on the letter H (*M. ADO*, III, iv, 56) was meant to point to that young nobleman. Thus bemused, the scholar is ready to date the earliest Sonnets as late as 1600.

9. In view of the difficulties all round, it was natural that Charles Knight, with his loyal apriorism, should, like everybody else, accept the whole Quarto as unquestionably Shakespearean, and should frame for his day a new schema (1841-4), in which "Mr. W. H." the "begetter" is explained, after Chalmers, as the mere "obtainer" or procurer of the Sonnets for Thorpe; and a new order of these is constructed, in which (Group I) the punning Sonnets (135, 136, 143) figure as juvenilia; those on black eyes as early missives to the address of Anne Hathaway; others as sent to various persons of both sexes; some as *vers de société*; some

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reproaching an unfaithful mistress or friend; while two other groups are made of (II) a number of the Sonnets of friendship, absence, estrangement, and expatiation; and (III) those to the beautiful youth, ideally and dramatically considered. This was recognisably an attempt to improve on the summary divisions of Brown; but like those it will not bear investigation. Save for the sensible positions (deriving from Drake and Boswell) that the 1-126 series is not consistently to be regarded as wholly addressed to one person, and that there may be in it both personal and impersonal pieces, Knight's scheme is obviously unsatisfactory, as raising more difficulties than it removes. Not only are his assignments to Anne Hathaway pure guesswork, and highly improbable at that, since they make Shakespeare forerun the sonneteering of the 'nineties: his distribution of friendship Sonnets in two groups is without adequate motivation; and the total rearrangement is unconvincing, though his general argument against the Quarto order is unanswerable.

10. It is surprising, on the other hand, to find Charles Bathurst, in his notably intelligent and original 'Remarks on Shakespeare's Versification' (1857), pronouncing the Sonnets "for the most part, evidently in order," though not, as some¹ had said, that of a continuous series of poems. In the verse he sees no diversity; but he usefully points to the similar quality of that of III, ii, 1-16, 33-39, of the COMEDY OF ERRORS, here noting style and manner as apart from mere coincidences of phrase.

Bathurst is the first Shakespearean, apart from Coleridge (whom he does not quote though he at times had him in mind), to show a keen sense of versification; and when he fails to detect differences in the Sonnets we may reasonably be sure that such detection will not be very easy. But even as in regard

¹ The reference is doubtless to Coleridge.

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to the plays he is at times hampered by unpreparedness to see non-Shakespearean matter where it had not previously been suspected, it is to be inferred that in regard to the Sonnets he was less on the alert for differences than he might have been had he not taken for granted that the contents of the Quarto are homogeneous as to authorship, though discernibly varying in poetic value. Though they interested him greatly, the best impressing him as "among the very finest poems that can be produced," he did not study them, as he did the plays, in comparison with contemporary work of the same kind. "The style," he observes, "is founded on Spenser, but more enriched." Had he examined the sonnets of Sidney, Daniel, and Drayton, he might have carried analysis further.

11. In 1857 Dyce reprinted, with some alterations, in his own edition of the Plays, the Memoir he had contributed to the Aldine edition of the Poems in 1832; but now referred only to Sonnet 121 as possibly reflecting Shakespeare's "genuine feelings"; though he modified his original declaration, "I have long felt convinced," to "well-nigh convinced." At this stage, critical inquiry was turned into other channels by J. P. Collier's publication of his second edition of the Plays, in which his manipulation of his "MS. Corrector" aroused the storm of exposure which destroyed his critical and personal credit. No weight, therefore, was left either to his declaration that the Sonnets were evidently written at different periods, or that he had entirely abandoned the hypothesis that they were written "on behalf of friends"; and his assent to the "obtainer" theory counted for as little.

12. In other forms than those put by Boswell, Knight, and Dyce, the "impersonal" theory continued to be heard of. An amateur, Robert Cartwright, in 1859 edited the Sonnets in a new order of Four Parts, deciding for Southampton as the young recipient

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and also as the Adonis of the VENUS; but with the suggestion that Shakespeare may have selected a beautiful youth as object by way of "quizzing" the follies of sonneteering. The further theorem that ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA embodies the persons of the Sonnets (Antony being Shakespeare; Octavia, his wife; Cleopatra, the Dark Lady; Enobarbus, Southampton; Lepidus, Marlowe; Sextus Pompeius, Herbert; and Menas, Thomas Thorpe!) effectively removed Mr. Cartwright from the field of serious discussion; though Barnstorff's "Mr. William Himself" solution, naturally one of the best remembered in the whole literature of the subject, did not suffice to discredit entirely his general hypothesis that the poet is apostrophising his ideal self under the alternate guises of a youth and a mistress.¹

13. Boswell's and Knight's and Dyce's theory that the themes or episodes in the Sonnets are mostly "poetical fictions" was endorsed by Howard Staunton in his edition (1861), and continued to find adherents, both in England and Germany; Delius giving it his virtual support in 1865. Meanwhile J. A. Heraud (1862) had carried the "ideal" view to ludicrous lengths, finding Sonnets 1-17 a Protestant declaration against celibacy addressed to Shakespeare's ideal self; the Dark Lady the "black but comely" bride of the Canticles; and the "better angel" and the "worse spirit" the Reformed Church and the Celibate Church respectively.

14. In contrast to this, the note of Taine (1863) has almost the effect of a recall to common sense; though that is not exactly the quality of the comment on the Sonnets in the 'Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise.' A work which has aroused so many young British readers to a new curiosity about their literature

¹ *Schlüssel zu Shakspeare's Sonnetten*, Bremen, 1860 (English translation, *A Key to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1862).

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is to be leniently reviewed, however provoking it may have been found by their elders. But it is difficult to award Taine, as critic, more than the praise of stimulation. His foible as thinker is unguarded inference and generalisation rather formal than factual; and we might perhaps add that the foible of his brilliant style is stress. We get all these at the outset of the chapter on Shakespeare. At the close of that preceding we learn that he is but a duplicate of his corrivals, with a stronger impulse. In the first paragraph of this he is the genius of extremes; in the second, "the irregularities, the successes, the passions . . . which we meet in his life are pretty much those that we find everywhere else"; and the Stratford myths are woven into the presentment. Yet on the premiss that in Shakespeare "all comes from within," circumstances counting for little, there follows the conclusion that the actor's life disordered the poet's character. "*Nos habitudes françaises d'analyse et de logique*," which Taine modestly confesses to be disturbed by the spectacle of Shakespeare, do really seem to have gone out of action for the moment.

The final conception formed of Shakespeare by Taine appears to be¹ that in him mental activity was a play of temperament, imagination, and pure passion, uncontrolled by what we specify as judgment or reason—an æsthetic fallacy so crude as to make us doubt our grasp of his meaning. But it seems to dominate his view of the Poems and Sonnets as well as of the Plays, though at the end of the first section we have the surmise that after all the poet was a solid person with a solid head and a real self-control. The other view recurs all the same. Thus on a citation of the

¹ See the end of his section i, the end of his chapter i, and again the passage (sec. iii): "His dominant faculty is the impassioned imagination, freed of the restraints of reason and morals." But compare the end of section i.

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VENUS stanza beginning, "Lo, hear the gentle lark," we have the comment: "Admirable debauch of imagination and of verve, disquieting nevertheless; such a temperament can lead far. No lady of pleasure in London who had not ADONIS on her table." A later French critic has justly repugned "*le cant anglais*"; but Taine seems to have taken the good Frenchman's pleasure in exposing English immorality.¹ One can but demur in that connection to the French cant of logic.

For Taine, in his first section, it holds of Shakespeare that "'the sweet abandonment of love' has been the great employment of his life." In his second section, "The sonnets are a delirium of ideas and images struck out with an energy which gives us vertigo. . . . VENUS AND ADONIS is the sensual ecstacy of a Correggio, insatiable and inflamed." When we turn for ourselves to the (relatively) machine-made LUCRECE—especially after re-reading the critic's suggestions that the poet may have escaped the perils of his overflowing imagination by the force thereof, and that, like Goethe, he liberated himself from passion by putting it in his poetry—we are moved to wish that our analyst had simply asked himself how an artist's mind really works; whether he feels drunk when writing about drunkenness; and whether a sonneteer who pictures himself as enslaved by an unfaithful brunette may not write with irony rather than, in Taine's words, with "deep impudicities of soul, such as are to be met only in the alcoves of courtesans." The "*cant anglais*," apparently, is not without French rivalry. *Odi et amo* is a sufficiently ancient note in poetry. But, warned by Taine's analogical procedure with regard to Musset, we had better avoid a hazardous extension of it to Catullus.

¹ Not that he keeps up any such pose. He speaks with generous admiration (B. II, ch. ii, sec. vii) on English women and family life.

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The most really noteworthy aspect of Taine's treatment of the Sonnets, for our inquiry, is his disregard of the latterly normal English assumption that Sonnets 1-126 are all addressed to a male. Making no reference to Mrs. Jameson, he does not even discuss the point: he simply takes Sonnets 95, 98, 99, and by implication others of the first series, as palpably addressed to a woman or women. This, however, does not seem to have aroused any discussion among English Shakespeareans, the view taken of 95, indeed, being untenable; though the presentment of Shakespeare as given up to sexual passion all his life was to bear English fruit, with English acclamation, in our own time. The recent memory of that, therefore, is a bar to any quasi-nationalist censure of the theorising of Taine, who had at least a variety of views.

15. In the year of the birth-centenary (and perhaps prepared for that occasion) appeared 'The Life and Genius of Shakespeare,' by Thomas Kenny, which forms an interesting exception to the general run of English biographical study of Shakespeare, and has met with very little notice or criticism.¹ Kenny's view is, in brief, that Shakespeare is the greatest of poets, but that he had a "slight" and retiring personality. In accordance with this view, he finds (p. 100) that though the Sonnets and the Poems "are distinguished by great sweetness of language and imagery, and, above all . . . display that rapid, acute sensibility which is the very life breath of imaginative genius"; and though "the sonnets in particular form perhaps the most striking revelation of individual character which the whole world of letters supplies,"² they "never ascend into the

¹ Kenny's book appears to have had small sale. The present writer, who from his youth up scanned everything on Shakespeare that he could lay hands on, never met with it till recent years. Elze is the only biographer who discusses it.

² A strange extravagance, in view of Montaigne and Rousseau.

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higher and wider regions of passion and invention. . . . They are marked by no originality or vigour of conception, by no especial brightness or rapidity of expression . . . his whole work is feeble, diffuse, indistinct, without any concentrated interest of thought or feeling. There is not a single sonnet, or a single passage in the poems, which the world greatly cares to remember."

It is unnecessary at this time of day to answer such pseudo-paradoxical criticism, which so strangely contradicts itself. But the theory of personality, which in part derives from Hallam, may be in a measure worth considering, though not accepting. "The poems," says Kenny (here perhaps echoing Hazlitt), "reflect the vague and unimposing conditions of his personality. In the dramas he is 'broad and general as the casing air'; and the very want of a firm, distinctly marked individuality enabled him the more readily to restore its own life to the wonderful universe beyond him." Some underlying element in this bald antithesis may suggest itself before we have done with the Sonnet problem.

16. Kenny's book might, had he met with it, have been welcomed by Gustav Rümelin, who at that period (1866) led the temporary "Anti-Shakespeare" movement in Germany; but the cue does not seem to have been taken up there; and the German Sonnet literature proceeded mainly on Southamptonian lines, with chronic excursion into the mystical, Kenny finding no German acceptance.

17. F. T. Palgrave, on the other hand (1865 ed. of *Sonnets*), found reality "stamped on the Sonnets not less forcibly than the mythical character upon the autobiography of Dante's early days";¹ and adhered

¹ Remarks at end of vol. Dowden says that Palgrave omitted two Sonnets. He omitted four, but merely because they were "connected with the *Venus* and marked, like it, by a warmth of colouring unsuited for the world at large." He makes no suggestion of non-authenticity as to any.

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to the identification of Herbert with the chief subject; while the American E. A. Hitchcock (1865) reverted to the "ideal" plane for a conception of that subject as the Spirit of Beauty, with Reason for its masculine and the affections for its feminine side.

18. Meantime the American commentator, Richard Grant White, had rejected the Southampton theory in the opening volume (1865) of his edition of Shakespeare, pronouncing the Pembroke theory "alone worthy of serious consideration," though he found Armitage Brown's division of the Sonnets into six series "merely arbitrary," and the assumption of a single male subject untenable, even apart from the last series. Accordingly he adopted the "procurer" solution, and, admitting that "begetter" never did really carry that meaning, accepted it as an affectation of Thorpe's. As Thorpe had actually prefixed a dedication at once impudent and fantastic to his edition of Marlowe's version of the First Book of Lucan, this was a warrantable inference; but the critic did not proceed to ask whether Thorpe's standards of behaviour leave us with any warrant for the genuineness of the ascription of the entire body of the Sonnets to Shakespeare.

White's chief contribution to the debate is his sensible suggestion that "a doting mother" might have commissioned the first seventeen Sonnets, which are inexplicable as being volunteered by the young Shakespeare to an adored friend. Yet, adds White, "I hazard this conjecture with little confidence." Much less appealing is his strange suggestion that the Sonnets, "like the plays, had been sold, and were not properly under [Shakespeare's] control" — a hypothesis offered to account for the non-publication by him of poems which the critic avowedly cannot conceive of his wishing to publish. Equally unsatisfactory is the insistence that such Sonnets as Nos. 62, 63, and

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73 could very well have been written "in those days" by a man in his prime—a view previously put by Armitage Brown.

19. At this stage, Gerald Massey found a good opening for his elaborate and ingenious solution¹ of the problem by a division of the Sonnets into personal and dramatic, combining the Southampton and the Herbert claims by identifying Herbert with "W. H." as "procurer," and bringing both personages into a private drama in which Shakespeare first exhorts Southampton to marry, and later acts as mouthpiece for him and Elizabeth Vernon in turn in respect of their loves and jealousies, besides commenting in his own person on their affairs and those of Lady Rich; while Herbert contributes some sonnets of his own. The first suggestion of the kind had come from Mrs. Jameson. Massey's eloquence and confidence made a number of converts, and convinced the German-Swiss Fritz Krauss, who produced (1872) a new translation of the first 126 Sonnets arranged in terms of Massey's schema; as Bodenstedt had previously arranged *his* translation in four parts, apparently with an eye to Cartwright. But Massey's detailed interpretation, being wholly subjective, incapable of any sort of objective proof, and eminently improbable on its face at many points, found no adherents among the professional critics in England; and its reduction to concrete detail of the quite plausible surmise that Shakespeare wrote many of the Sonnets *for* other persons (as Drayton avows having done in one case) probably

¹ *Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted*, 1866. Recast under title *The Secret Drama of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1872. Rep. in a limited edition, 1888. Massey's first sketch of his theory appeared in a *Quarterly Review* article, which, according to Ph. Chasles (who ascribes it to "un Anglais, homme d'esprit, rédacteur du *Quarterly Review*"), was inspired by an American treatise which regarded the Sonnets as wholly dramatic (*L'Angleterre au Seizième Siècle*, 1879, pp. 89-90). The reference appears to be to Hitchcock.

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set up distrust of all such speculation. At an early stage Massey had surmised that certain Sonnets (96, 130, 145, 151, 153), in respect of "bad workmanship," were non-Shakespearean, and assigned them to Pembroke. Later, he dropped this theory and made Shakespeare write 96 for Elizabeth Vernon, and the others "for Master Will Herbert." He had no tests save an intuition which varied. When, again, we find Sonnets 29 and 30 confidently explained as written on behalf of Southampton, our faith fails us. The barely plausible is treated as the certain.

This was the more unfortunate because some of Massey's primary positions were really strong. When, for instance, he writes, "It is a matter of natural and therefore of Shakespearean necessity that such a sonnet as No. 48 can only be spoken to a woman by a man," though he instantly evokes the rejoinder that it is more fitly to be conceived as addressed by a woman to a man, he indicates a path of scrutiny that has not been adequately followed. Such lines as

But thou to whom my jewels trifles are

and

Within the gentle closure of my breast

alike suggest a woman speaker; while the latter sets up the further surmise that the Sonnet may be written *for* her rather than by her. And though both hypotheses induce doubt as to whether the author is really Shakespeare, despite his "*quiet* closure of my breast" in the VENUS (l. 782)¹ he may conceivably have acted as a woman's mouthpiece. But to go beyond that and assume the speaking person to be either Southampton addressing (through his poet) Elizabeth Vernon, or that lady so addressing him, is to pretend to certitude where it is not rationally attainable.

¹ Here, indeed, the use of the phrase by Adonis may seem to argue for its use by a male in the sonnet. But the "gentle" is a significant modification.

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Of much more concrete importance, for the practical critic, are Massey's comment (*a*) on "A God in love," in Sonnet 110, which has been ignored, I think, by all the commentators—even by Professor Alden—though the question is of special interest; and (*b*) his proposition (ed. 1888, p. 48) that Sonnet 26, usually treated as an envoy to the preceding, is properly to be regarded as a missive sent to Southampton with the manuscript of the *VENUS*, soliciting his patronage for the printing. Had Massey always been so clairvoyant, his performance as a whole would have been more durable. But of course Dowden paid no heed. Some of Massey's emendations were good, and have been found acceptable; but one of the best, *lose* for *leave* in Sonnet 73, l. 14, has been overlooked. (Probably the poet wrote *leese*, as has been conjectured by Butler.)¹

20. Small acceptance, naturally, was won by the bold proposition of Philarète Chasles,² effusively adopted by Bolton Corney (1862), that the dedication of Thorpe's Quarto should be read in the sense "to the only begetter . . . Mr. W. H. wisheth all happiness . . .," leaving "the well-wishing adventurer" without a verb. The "W. H." of M. Chasles was at first Herbert, an inference discarded by him later in favour of William Hathaway, Shakespeare's brother-in-law, who was held likely to be the possessor of the MS. That hypothesis had been previously put forward by an Edinburgh Shakespearean, Samuel Neil. But in the total lack of evidence for Hathaway's intervention, that solution, despite its primary appeal, and some backing from H. W. Hudson (1872), has finally found hardly more favour than Farmer's singularly unlucky guess at William Harte, the poet's nephew (soon discovered to have been born in 1600); and less favour

¹ The present writer made the same emendation independently.

² Essay rep. in *L'Angleterre au Seizième Siècle*, 1879.

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than was earned by Tyrwhitt's guess of a William Hughes from the "*Hews*" of Sonnet 20.

Apart from his quaint fantasy about the syntax of the dedication, and his bad guess at William Hathaway, Chasles writes of the Sonnets with a good deal of judgment, making fit fun of the symbolism of Barnstorff and others. On the other hand, he seems to have been the first to hint at what we may now term the Butler theory, though he did not elaborate it.¹ He was at pains to copy all the Sonnets with his own hand, studying and commenting them for ten years with a view to an edition (which never appeared), and further to get access to a copy of the 1609 Quarto. Of the purport of the Sonnets he took an eclectic view, finding them all personal, but certainly not addressed, even as to the majority, to one man. Some he ranks as youthful follies; a dozen or fifteen he held for exercises in verse-making; nine or ten others "consecrated to a great lady unknown,"² object of the most humble and the most tender devotions"; eight or ten "cries of the heart" of the strolling actor; some twenty addressed to Southampton, the patron; about a dozen, *souvenirs de voyage*; twenty-five or thirty admonitory of a gifted but libertine youth, probably Pembroke; ten or fifteen to the fickle lady musician; twenty more implicating the youth and the lady; "a dozen magnificent sonnets in favour of Essex conquered and Southampton prisoner"; one against the queen; and about twenty others of regret, repentance, and melancholy. But there is no detailed exposition; and the considerable English reputation of Chasles did not avail to win attention to his more reasonable speculation as against his unhappy reading of Thorpe's dedication. That was

¹ *L'Angleterre au Seizième Siècle*, 1879, p. 77.

² This idea is found also in Taine, who may have adopted it from Chasles. It is not, however, developed in the later theory about Mary Fitton.

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vainly trumpeted by Bolton Corney, who, however, held the Sonnets to be mere poetical exercises written for Southampton, but presented in print to him by "Mr. W. H." = William Herbert. Nor did the assent of François Victor Hugo to the Southampton theory (in his rearranged French translation, 1862) add to the vogue of that, his general interpretation being fancifully arbitrary, in accordance with his new order.

21. No more acceptance, probably, was won by the treatise of Richard Simpson, entitled 'An Introduction to the Philosophy of Shakespeare's Sonnets' (1868). The thesis is that they embody the philosophy of Love as expounded by Plato and by Boethius, and developed by Italian poets and philosophic essayists. For Simpson (pp. 5-6), "W. H." was "either the Earl of Southampton, or some other young man of birth and wealth, wit and beauty, who had travelled into Italy and come back brimming over with academes and love philosophy, with Petrarch and Platonism, upon which he disputed with Shakespeare, and by his discussions begot the Sonnets." This description, as it happens, will suit neither Southampton in 1590-3 nor Pembroke in 1598. But, all the same, "LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST exhibits the Court of Navarre forming itself into 'a little academe,' the members of which wrote and recited sonnets and commented upon them. Shakespeare's own sonnets were evidently written under similar circumstances."

This assumption involves the further one that the Sonnets were published by Shakespeare's wish and authority. Ignoring the peculiar title, Simpson finds (p. 36) that the Quarto "bears none of the marks of surreptitious and unauthorised publication which are so conspicuous in the original quarto editions of the several plays. The printing is exceptionally correct for the time. . . ." The latter statement simply

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cannot stand, the text of the Quarto being much less correct than that of the Poems; while the bracket indications of omission at the end of Sonnet 126 show that the printer could not consult the author. In the light of the "philosophy of Love" theory, Simpson explains, the Sonnets "appear to be articulated and arranged with rare subtlety and care." So much the worse, the critical reader must feel, for the theory. That is, in fact, a wholly indemonstrable thesis that all the changing topics of the Sonnets are but applications of some of the Platonic and Italian themes of the three kinds of love, the vulgar or sensual, the love of the mind, and the universal, in which "Love is theology, logic, morals, politics, natural history and astronomy. It is the sphere of which all sciences are superficial segments."

Save for a well-taken point (p. 75) as to the difficulty of reconciling a number of the Sonnets with any one "personal" interpretation, the treatise does but substitute the hopelessly complicated problem of a poetical allegory for the concrete problems which face the student. In the light of Simpson's later compilation, 'The School of Shakespeare' (1878), one can realise the fatality of his cast of mind. With much learning and diligence he tables a series of propositions as to Shakespeare's connection with a set of old plays never otherwise assigned to him, without a shred of either internal or external evidence to bear him out. "Addled eggs"—Fleay's verdict on the 'School'—fits equally the thesis of the treatise.

22. Henry Brown, in his turn, found some 250 subscribers for his treatise, 'The Sonnets of Shakespeare Solved [*sic*], and the Mystery of his Friendship, Love and Rivalry Revealed' (1870), but supplied them only with an adaptation of the Herbert theory to the purposes of a new analysis of the two series into (1) satires on the sonneting of ideal mistresses; (2) auto-

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biographical poems; and (3) a celebration of the marriage of Shakespeare's Muse to Herbert—the "only begetter." Incidentally, Shakespeare makes love to the Dark Lady only because she is beloved by his friend, who is his other self; and the Sonnets of that series are "pre-eminently parodies." Taking this view, Brown is quite convinced that "Shakespeare gave instructions to Thorpe as to the dedication." Dowden, who benevolently pronounces Brown's paraphrases of the Sonnets to be "often really helpful," does not mention that in his view the "fickle maid full pale" of *A LOVER'S COMPLAINT* "seems to be no other than Queen Elizabeth." Naturally Brown's doctrine did not evoke enthusiasm; and his theories that the "rival poet" was Sir John Davies, and that in Jonson's *EPICÆNE* "Sir John Daw represents Shakespeare, and Sir Amorous La Foole Herbert, drawn to the life," found no currency. "Daw," and "Sir John," in Brown's opinion, may have been suggested to Jonson by Greene's allusion to Shakespeare in the *GROAT'S WORTH OF WIT* as a *Johannes Factotum* and a "daw arrayed in our plumage." The fact that Greene said "crow," not "daw," gave no trouble. Dowden, who could see in Fleay's early essay nothing but the extravagances, does not seem to have been disturbed by these flights.

23. Meanwhile, despite Barnstorff, German criticism had in the main steered a conservative course, largely following Gervinus, who in his copious monograph on Shakespeare (1849; fourth edition, 1872) found the Southampton theory the most probable, and the initials of the dedication to have been a calculated device. "Begetter," for Gervinus, meant "inspirer." Delius, leaning to Boswell and Knight, had preferred "procurer"; Sievers (1866), dating all the Sonnets early, took the Southampton side; as did Bodenstedt in 1862; and as did H. von Friesen (1874) with modifications, but keeping the dates between 1590

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and 1595. Carl Karpf (1869) reverted to Barnstorffian mysticism, making Shakespeare's sonnet-subject his own genius, and the Dark Lady his Muse; an idea apparently accepted in part by Fleay in 1875; but the sober Kreyssig (1864-74) insisted on real motives and experience for most of the Sonnets, while recognising in some of them "light poetical exercises" in the mode of the period. Thus did that view chronically recur.

Ulrici, again,¹ came regretfully to the conclusion that neither the Southampton nor the Pembroke theory can be sustained, and that we "must admit that we do not know, nor can we even guess, to whom the mysterious dedication was addressed." For the rest, he repels "the vagaries of Neil and Massey," and at the same time deprecates the tendency of his friend Delius to reduce the Sonnets to "poetical exercises." Elze, on the other hand,² rejecting with Ulrici the identification of "W. H." with either of the earls, embraced the "obtainer" theory, and pronounced Neil's "William Hathaway" solution "the one hypothesis above all others that seems most plausible," but with Ulrici found the "romances" of C. A. Brown and Massey "absolutely untenable." For the rest, Elze was at pains to repel the attack of Kenny on the moral character revealed by the Sonnets.

24. Of fresher interest was the essay of Karl Goedeke, in the *Deutsche Rundschau* of March, 1877, tracing (it would seem, for the first time) the varying uses of *thou* and *you* in addressing the recipients of the Sonnets—a clue which has in recent years received some attention, but appears to yield no light, the two forms being apparently used indifferently by other sonneteers of the period. Goedeke's general

¹ Third edition of his 'Shakespeare's Dramatic Art,' 1874 (English translation, 1876).

² *William Shakespeare, a Literary Biography* (German edition, 1876; English translation, 1888).

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conclusion, that the Sonnets are addressed alike to real and to imaginary persons, and his special discoveries that Sonnet 38 is addressed to Queen Elizabeth, 29, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 97 to Shakespeare's wife, and 108 to his son Hamnet, might have encouraged prompt dismissal of his "thou and you" problem, had not Dowden taken it up and tabulated the facts.

25. In England, matters in the main went otherwise. Furnivall, in his characteristically vivacious and vernacular introduction to the Leopold Shakespeare (1877), spent much labour on arranging the Sonnets in a multitude of groups, identifying the male addressee always as "Will," and thus rejecting the Southampton theory, which he flouted without examination. Beyond accepting Minto's identification of the rival poet as Chapman, the energetic director of the New Shakspeare Society did little to advance the problem of the Sonnets. Minto,¹ one of the most independent and sagacious minds of his generation, as free of the fields of philosophy and logic as of that of literature, distinguished himself in Shakespeare matters chiefly by the well-documented thesis last referred to; his adoption of the Pembroke solution of the "W. H." riddle failing to justify itself by disposal of the counter-case. His very interesting ascription to Shakespeare of a complimentary Sonnet to Florio will be examined in a later section. It does not appear to have won any assent.

Everything that Minto wrote, indeed, deserves to be well weighed; but without deflection from a deep respect for his notably original critical judgment I can confess that I have always thought his originality could now and then be swayed, in literary matters, more by whim than by science; and the specialism in detail that is requisite in the study of Shakespearean problems was less his forte than a large vision for large issues. A master in abstract logic, he was less consummate,

¹ *Characteristics of English Poets from Chaucer to Shirley*, 1874.

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though normally acute, in concrete estimate.¹ His induction up to Chapman as the rival poet is the soundest made in that connection. His verdict (anticipated by Henry Brown) that the Sonnets after 126 were all "exercises of skill, undertaken in a spirit of wanton defiance and derision of commonplace"; his adherence to the Pembroke theory; and his opinion that contemporaries would all understand Pembroke to be "Mr. W. H.," are not of that order. Sonnet 130 may be a skit upon the ninth of Constable's *DIANA* collection; but many of the last twenty-eight admit of no such interpretation. As to the Pembroke theory, Minto never meets the difficulties—not even the elementary difficulty that Lord Herbert was not the sole prop of his house, and therefore could not be said to tend to "ruinate" it by not marrying early. I agree with him that Sonnet 107 appears to point to the death of Elizabeth; but his assertion that that opinion is "indisputable" is a levity in view of the multiplicity of dissent.

26. Professor Spalding also, in an essay in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of March, 1878, took the Pembroke side, but without contributing any noticeable new light; and the same may be said of the sketch of Shakespeare's life by W. M. Rossetti,² who also took the Pembroke view. David Main, one of Massey's semi-converts, gave him some support in his 'Treasury of English Sonnets' (1880) while taking Pembroke, as did Massey, to be "W. H.," in respect that he had provided the "copy" for the publisher. The balance of English votes thus far, as Professor Gollancz (himself a Southamptonian) admitted in his 'Temple' edition of the Sonnets (1894), was on the Pembroke side of things.

¹ He was one of the first to deliver a judgment at once judicial and sympathetic in the case of Poe.

² *Lives of Famous Poets*, 1877.

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27. The eighth decade of the century, it will have been noted, had been particularly fertile in discussion on the Sonnets; and towards the close it produced some signal extravagances; three of them hailing from Australia. G. S. Caldwell first announced 'Sir Walter Raleigh the author of Shakspeare's Plays and Sonnets' (Melbourne, 1877), intimating that Sonnets 71, 72, 73, and 74 "to my mind afford proof than which nothing could be stronger of the identification of Raleigh as the author," they being "addressed by Raleigh to his wife, when he was lying under sentence of death in 1603"; while some others are addressed by Raleigh to Queen Elizabeth, and No. 37 is a tribute to Prince Henry. Besides, Raleigh was wounded in 1596, and made lame for the rest of his life, which fact, applied to Sonnets 37 and 89, appears to have given Mr. Caldwell his theory. Three years later, G. Travers Smith, of Tasmania, put forth in an Australian review the revelation that the 126 Sonnets were addressed to an illegitimate son of the poet, probably by a woman of high rank. In the same year (1880) William Thomson, an Australian Baconian, discovered¹ that the Sonnets were written by Bacon in 1600, for presentation by Lord Herbert to the Queen, by way of winning back her favour for Essex; though she herself was indicated as a black beauty in respect of her latter hostility to him.

In the following year, again, Mrs. C. F. Ashmead Windle, of San Francisco, was allowed to read a paper to the New Shakspeare Society, then near its end, announcing Bacon as the author of the Plays, therein expressing "an Enigma under a veiled Allegory," to which the Sonnets are somehow a key, as combining a transcendent idealism with pathetic self-portraiture. Mrs. Windle's self-estimate, as cited by Dowden, fitly

¹ *The Renaissance Drama; or, History made Visible*, Melbourne, 1880.

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rounds his notice of her. "I find," she writes, "that my penetration into, and unfolding of the inmost mind and heart of, these plays, is a realisation of the deepest reach of sympathetic intuition of which the human intellect and soul are capable—only short of that attained by the immortal dramatist himself."

28. The transition from these lambent lunacies to Dowden's own preceding Introduction to the Sonnets must have been calming to conservative minds, of whom he was the fitting guide. Always broadly and studiously intelligent, and rarely open to a reconstructive idea, he left the problems of the Sonnets very much as he found them, producing the first adequately annotated edition, but throwing no new light on any of the issues indicated in the motley literature he had so faithfully surveyed, save in so far as he lucidly arrayed the considerations which tend to make the Sonnets intelligible on the traditional lines—the passionateness of male friendship in the Renaissance, the share in Shakespeare of the normal sensual man, and his inferable share of bitter experience.

One of the first to examine the enigma of WILLOBIE HIS AVISA, with its tantalising allusions to H. W. and W. S., "the new actor and the old player," Dowden argued, justly enough, that its data connect ill with the drama of the false friend and the Dark Lady in the Sonnets. Other enigmas he faces and "passes on." For him, though he sees the opening Sonnets to be early in style and phrasing, and therefore quite intractable to the Pembroke hypothesis, he in effect endorses the whole Pembroke theory by making the male addressee always a "Will"; and yet he gives harbourage to both theories by dating the Sonnets between 1592 (when Daniel gave the lead) and 1605. No Sonnet was by him rejected: all were for him Shakespeare's; and "no arrangement which has been proposed is as good as that of the Quarto."

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One of the latest of the serious treatises noticed by Dowden in his survey of 1881 is an essay by E. Stengel in the *Englische Studien* of that year. Dowden faithfully reproduces the new order given for the Sonnets in that essay, which puts No. 26 as the dedication, as did Krauss in his translation of 1872. The order is stated, but not examined. And though Goedeke's notation of the "thou" and "you" enigma is considered, it is only to justify the Quarto order by showing that in the first fifty Sonnets *you* is very rare; that in the next fifty *thou* and *you* approach to numerical equality; that in the next twenty-six *thou* is usual and *you* exceptional; and that in the Sonnets to the mistress *thou* is invariable. He does not draw the reasonable inference that the Sonnets of Part II are probably early.

29. A new departure, to no good end, was made by the then popular writer Charles Mackay in an article entitled "A Tangled Skein Unravelled" in the *Nineteenth Century* number for August, 1894. Mackay thought the hypothesis of an imaginary addressee for the first seventeen Sonnets "certainly tenable and worthy of consideration," but preferred to regard them as addressed to "Mr. William Herbert" (p. 244); and proceeds later to assume (p. 246) that the "Will" Sonnets were written by Herbert to the dark and beautiful Christina Bruce, afterwards Countess of Devonshire, whose husband was *William* Cavendish. That being settled, the "well-wishing adventurer" proceeds to deal with the Sonnets ostensibly referring to the dramatic profession, of which he finds no fewer than sixteen—30, 37, 38, 40, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 89-91, 110-13—were not written by Shakespeare either. "From internal and circumstantial evidence [not specified] they appear to have been written by Christopher Marlowe." The only noticeable explanation is that whereas Shakespeare

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could not say that Marlowe "spent all his might" (Sonnet 80) in praising Southampton, Marlowe *could* say it of Shakespeare. "Both your poets," *ergo*, were Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Another large batch of Sonnets are no less expeditiously disposed of by arguing, justly enough, that those confessing old age, 62-3, 73-4, cannot well be "personal" on Shakespeare's part; with the liberal corollary that they must be part of a series in which the poet dramatises for his own satisfaction the career of Leicester in regard to the Queen. Thus are accounted for Nos. 49, 57, 58, 62-9, 104-7, 113, 114, 118-22, 128, 140, 141, 142. With comparative moderation, the discoverer abstains from suggesting that the Sonnets in question were ever presented. The British public, however, seems to have treated the entire exposition with a coldness which the discoverer can hardly have anticipated.

30. Apart from the vigorous renewal of the strife over the Pembroke and Southampton theories, Sonnet literature for a decade or two adhered mainly to the trodden paths. The introduction to the 'Canterbury' edition of the Sonnets by William Sharp (1885) completely capitulates to the Pembroke-Fitton case, which is treated as practically proved; and also endorses the current assumption that the first 126 Sonnets are all addressed to one young male recipient. But Sharp independently advances the interesting argument (p. 24) that the Dark Lady Sonnets are not reasonably to be regarded as having been actually sent; and that Nos. 129, 144, 146, in particular, cannot be supposed to have been sent to the woman they refer to, the closing line of 141 being further cited in support. The suggestion has been overlooked by Professor Tucker in his recent edition, but is worth weighing.

31. Another interesting contribution to the main problem is made in a *Gentleman's Magazine* article by

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Mr. Robert Shindler in January, 1892. It is not very well or very weightily written, but it soundly stresses the points (1) that the Quarto is certainly unauthorised, and its order "in no way authoritative" (p. 74); that (2) "it is possible that many of the sonnets . . . are not Shakespeare's" (p. 78); and (3) in demur to the usual assumption, "It is clear that after 126 there are no sonnets to the friend; but not at all clear that among the earlier sonnets there are none in honour of the mistress" (p. 80). The separation of evidently connected Sonnets makes untenable the hypothesis of a single series chronologically arranged; and the location of 129 is a decisive proof of miscellaneity. As to authorship, the argument is rather ethical than technical, but still forcible, 151 being marked for doubt as "not only obscene but sickly and nauseous," while 144 is similarly challenged on the supposed Boccaccian allusion. But the challenge is not widely or rashly pressed, the general conclusion being (p. 82) that "The materials at our disposal are too scanty; we shall have to be largely satisfied with negative results."

32. A bolder note was struck in 1896 by the externally imposing work of Mr. John Pym Yeatman, barrister-at-law, entitled 'The Gentle Shakspeare.' The author does not allow his title to intimidate him; and among many other fuliginous propositions in his pages is this (p. 295): "That some [Sonnets] are not written by the same hand may be easily shown by their coarseness and impurity and utter incongruity—witness . . . 127 to 152, which are obviously addressed to an abandoned woman." Mr. Yeatman has standing to his name a long list of legal works, but does not seem willing to let the law of evidence interfere with his conclusions, though he intimates that, having once been a Baconian, he has utterly renounced that seductive creed. But he comes in touch with critical tests by suggesting that the repugnant Sonnets are very much

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in the style and spirit of Bartholomew Griffin. To that proposition no assent seems to have been forthcoming. The student who turns to Griffin in hope of finding a scapegoat for the cynicisms of the Quarto will find 62 of nearly the least inspired of the hundreds of sonnets to the cruel fair of that age. Some of the impeached Sonnets are indeed poor enough for him; but though one of his trifles is assigned to Shakespeare in the *PASSIONATE PILGRIM*, the poet of *FIDESSA* is not rationally to be conceived as fathering any but the worst of the Sonnets proper in the last group of the Quarto. Mr. Yeatman is but a darkener of critical counsel.

33. It might have been hoped that Dowden's sobering survey would give rise to a new and more comprehensive study of the whole complicated subject; but nothing useful, beyond the suggestions of Shindler, was forthcoming; and, as before noted, the closing decades of the century were mostly devoted to fighting the old battles over again. Lee found a final refuge in identifying "Mr. W. H." with a William Hall who had previously found other "copy" for Thorpe's printer—a fact noted long before, and capable of recalling the old remark that in the Thorpe dedication we have the sequence "Mr. W. H. ALL." But that life-belt has been commonly discarded as untrustworthy by energetic swimmers, who may justly claim that the enigma of the Sonnets remains even if "Mr. W. H." be thus got out of the way.

34. All through the controversy, it may be noted, Halliwell-Phillipps had maintained a firm front against all theories giving a personal application to the Sonnets. In his massive 'Life of Shakespeare'¹ (1848) he had

¹ An admirably learned volume, comprising in one chapter of 298 pages, without contents-table or index, all the then known documents relating to Shakespeare. Nothing so learned, so laborious, and so thorough had up to that date been achieved in Shakespearean biography.

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limited himself to the social and non-literary side of the subject; but in the later and still more massive compilation which he entitled 'Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare' (1881: eighth edition, 2 vols., 1889), he pronounces, in agreement with Boswell and Dyce and Delius, that

"The words of Meres, and the insignificant result of Jaggard's efforts [*i.e.*, in *THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM*], when viewed in connection with the nature of these strange poems, lead to the inference that some of them were written in clusters, and others as separate exercises, either being contributions made by their writer to the albums of his friends, probably no two of the latter being favoured with identical compositions. . . . The victim of spiritual emotions that involve criminatory reflections does not usually protrude them voluntarily on the consideration of society."¹

These critical positions, obviously, raise new difficulties. If the Sonnets existed only in separate clusters in different hands, how came they to be collected? Concerning "Mr. W. H.," it is remarked² that "the use of initials in the place of names, especially if they referred to private individuals, was then so extremely common that it is not necessary to assume that there was an intentional reservation." Thus Halliwell-Phillipps rejects alike the Southampton and the Pembroke theories, and is satisfied to read "begetter" as "obtainer," on the strength of the familiar citation from Dekker's *HISTRIOMASTIX* ("beget you the reversion") and Hamlet's "acquire and beget a temperance."³ But Hamlet's "beget" really means "develop," and, as Butler pointed out, the passage in Dekker is spoken by a Welshman who mangles the Queen's English. Certainly "onlie begetter" cannot hold literally of the 154 Sonnets; but the "obtainer" remains none the less a difficulty.

¹ *Outlines*, 8th ed., i, 173 *seq.*

² *Id.*, pp. 226-7.

³ *Id.*, ii, p. 305.

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Further, Halliwell-Phillipps, here following Boswell, keeps on foot an old difficulty for everybody by denying that the Sonnets which have been held to express a sense of degradation from the actor's profession can be read as so expressing Shakespeare's feeling. The argument (developed from Boswell) is that Shakespeare had "acquired a secure and definite competence independently of his emoluments as a dramatist," and yet he is found playing with Burbage and Hemmings at the Blackfriars Theatre in 1610. He shows, too, his vivid interest in the stage, and in the acted drama, in the dialogue in *HAMLET*; and in his will he exhibits his affectionate recollection of his fellow-players. He had, in sum, "braved public opinion in favour of a continued adherence to that which he felt was in itself a noble profession." Thus we reach the conclusion that "These considerations may suffice to eliminate a personal application from the two Sonnets above mentioned; and as to the remainder, if the only safe method, that of discarding all mere assumptions, be strictly followed, the clearer the ideality of most of them, and the futility of arguments resting on any other basis, will be perceived."

The conclusion, obviously, has been too lightly reached, though it has the support of Fleay.¹ Many men, surely, have expressed at times disgust over the drudgeries or the incidental humiliations of their professions, and still adhered to them. Doctors, lawyers, politicians (to say nothing of clergymen, who had need be more reticent), have so expressed themselves; and of all men a sensitive actor, a man of genius on another plane, not on this, is about the most likely to pass through such an experience.² We have but

¹ *Biog. Chron.*, ii, 218.

² Take the case of Macready, with the "morbid sensitiveness on the subject of *his* social status that tortured him" in the period of his rise. "My experience," he wrote, "has taught me that . . . in other

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to remember that the "actor" sonnets are presumably to be dated about or before the middle of the 'nineties, in order to realise that there was a period in Shakespeare's theatre life before he had established himself as the honoured poet of his company, and that in that period he might well taste of humiliations which later ceased for him. By Halliwell-Phillipps's own admission, the motive of Shakespeare in seeking for a coat-of-arms was to "advance his social position"—that is, to be no longer legally classifiable as a "rogue and vagabond." The "actor" Sonnets, then, which in their note are among the most poignantly personal of all, and which cannot be conceived as written on behalf of another than the author, seem to many of us to repel the argument here brought against them; and the case for an "ideal" or "impersonal" interpretation of the mass is left the weaker for such a collapse. It cannot be so grounded; and the problem remains standing.

So remarkably divided, indeed, are the decisions of the leading commentators and critics on the "actor" problem as raised by Sonnet 110 and the next, that it is likely to remain for long an open debate. Massey's "dramatic" interpretation, making 110 a message *for* Southampton, making confession to Elizabeth Vernon, has probably no surviving adherents, though his interpretation of "A God in love" is well worth careful thought; but when high conflicting authorities are equally convinced that Sonnet 110 *does* and that it does *not* refer to the humiliations of the actor's calling, we are conscious of something like an *impasse*. We can but narrowly scrutinise (as herein-

callings the profession confers dignity; . . . on the stage, the player must contribute respect to the exercise of his art." The experience caused him "many moments of depression, many angry swellings of the heart" (Archer's *Macready*, p. 14). This in the nineteenth century. In Elizabethan times, the situation, for the actor, was often worse.

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after) the problem in connection with those which it involves.

35. Some thoughtful students, alive to such issues, were not unnaturally moved to a new reserve by so much insoluble controversy. One of the best monographs on Shakespeare of the last generation is the American Professor Barrett Wendell's 'William Shakspeare: A Study in Elizabethan Literature' (1894), wherein every aspect is handled with a concern for new apperception rather than for the new eloquence which had been so lavishly supplied by Swinburne. Coming to the Sonnets, though he has begun by calling them "these most conscientiously artistic of Shakespeare's works," which is a partly debatable judgment, Wendell avows (p. 224) that

"If one could make sure of what they mean, we might confidently feel intimate knowledge of their author. Such confidence, though, has betrayed too many honest critics into absurdity, to prove, nowadays, however tempting, a serious danger. The only impregnable answer to the question of what the *Sonnets* signify is the one lately made by some German writer: *Ignoramus, ignorabimus*, 'we do not know, and we never shall.'"¹

Still, the searcher is not content to be agnostic. He sees that the Pembroke-Fitton theory is at best a plausibility, not a provable thesis; and on the central problem he remarks that "Off-hand, of course, one would declare the very frankness of self-revelation thus suggested to be incredible. Sensitiveness, one would say, is *essentially reticent*; and whoever wrote the Sonnets proved thereby the possession of rare sensitiveness." Thus had those felt who, long before Browning's outburst, had put to Dowden² the anomalousness of the notion that the myriad-minded

¹ The phrase, I think, was really current as pronounced by Dubois-Reymond in connection, not with any Shakespeare problem, but with that of the universe.

² Ed. cited, *Intro.*, p. 7.

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Shakespeare sincerely prostrated himself before a boy patron. But Wendell answers himself by pointing to Mrs. Browning's 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,' and the self-portrayals of Musset and George Sand and Tennyson; as if Mrs. Browning's love-sonnets were on a par with either the modish panegyric or the prostrate avowals of the Shakespeare Sonnets, and as if the other cases were comparable either. The upshot seems to be that any artist is likely to do anything that any artist ever did, *and more*.

Yet the critic again reflects that "the real doubt, after all, concerns only what caused" the emotional moods that the Sonnets portray; "and that is a question rather of gossip and of scandal, of impertinent curiosity, than of criticism." Here we partly revert to the agnostic attitude, yet withal inconsistently, for it is as a question not solely of the mere expression of moods, but of *whose* expression, and of whether the expression is at any point personal or "dramatic"—that is to say, a *lent* expression or an impersonal poetic projection—that the Sonnets are felt to be enigmatic at all. As simple pieces of poetry, however obscure at times, they are readily enough amenable to criticism; and if the world of readers could be content with that, there would be no very serious problems to discuss. But the critic himself goes on to discuss the Sonnets quasi-philosophically, affirming that they exhibit "the lasting tragedy of earthly love," as if one of every pair of lovers *must* be unworthy or inadequate.

Yet further, the agnostic attitude is abandoned in the proposition (pp. 223-4) that "Of Shakespeare's Sonnets . . . we may fairly assert that they must have seemed to the writer more important and valuable than his plays"—this on the sole and slender ground that we must suppose all the repetitions of the convention about the immortalising power of verse to have

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been made in dead earnest and with proud certainty. There remains, too, the critical difficulty, not faced by Wendell, that we have no right to be sure that all the Sonnets are Shakespeare's; and when the critic founds the last cited argument on so ill-written a Sonnet as 81, and cites in succession 129, 130, 64, and 65, of which each for a sensitive ear may raise questions of purely literary dubiety as to their authorship, rather than the sense of that perfect attainment of beauty of expression which the critic finds pervading the Sonnets "throughout," we are left conscious of much purely critical work still to be done.

36. Hopes probably ran high when, in 1898, there appeared the English translation of 'William Shakespeare, A Critical Study,' by Dr. Georg Brandes, the most comprehensive and the most energetic attempt made since Gervinus to survey the work and deduce the personality of the dramatist. Inevitably, however, the multitude of judgments involved gave rise to much dispute; and this included the handling of the Sonnets. At the outset Dr. Brandes leaves speculation open by the remark, at the close of his first chapter, that "To determine the value of the Sonnets as autobiographical documents requires not only historical knowledge but critical instinct and tact, since it is by no means self-evident that the poet is, in a literal sense, speaking in his own name." But when the Sonnets come up for examination (B. II, ch. v) we find them at once specified as that one of Shakespeare's works "which, more than any other, enables us to look into his inmost soul"; and, what is more surprising, the position taken up that "this work, as the latest and most penetrating of his students and critics have established, must date from about 1601."

This means that Dr. Brandes has adopted the Pembroke-Fitton theory in full; though the choice of the date 1601 is mystifying in view of the exposi-

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tion which follows.¹ In the most uncompromising fashion, Dr. Brandes decides that "There can be no doubt that *the* poet's friend whom *the* Sonnets celebrate bore the Christian name of William (see Sonnets 135, 136, 143)"—a proposition not for a moment to be accepted on any evidence yet forthcoming, though Dowden and Furnivall were content with it. It might have occurred to Dr. Brandes to inquire whether even the three Sonnets on which he founds his sweeping inference may not have referred to a "Willoughby," called "Will" by his friends. Not that that inference, if drawn, would carry us to a Willoughby for the first 126.

For the rest, Dr. Brandes makes overbold commitments in pronouncing the Quarto order of the Sonnets "careful" because it is hard to rectify; and in deciding that Tyler has "conclusively demonstrated that Sonnet 55 is inspired by Meres"—a thesis which we shall find disproved; that Sonnets 1-126 form a continuous poem; and that they began in 1598. The lure of the Dark Lady appears responsible for these too summary pronouncements, which could hardly have commended themselves to such a sound judgment as that of Dr. Brandes normally is, unless he had been carried away by the conviction that Mary Fitton *must* be "the unexpressive she."

37. Professor Churton Collins, while challenging Lee's literary sense, approximated to his conclusions, declaring himself "very much inclined to suspect" that the Sonnets "owed their origin to the fashion of composing sonnet cycles; that those cycles suggested their themes, and gave them the ply; that the beautiful youth, the rival poet, and the dark lady, are pure fictions of the imagination; and that these poems are autobiographical only in the sense in which VENUS

¹ On p. 310 Dr. Brandes appears to reduce the proposition to this, that the first 126 Sonnets had been written by 1601.

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AND ADONIS, THE RAPE OF LUCRECE, ROMEO AND JULIET, and OTHELLO are autobiographical.”¹ Lee had not gone so far.

38. Such criticism might be held to keep in countenance such doctrine as that of ‘The Mystery of Shakespeare’s Sonnets: An Attempted Elucidation,’ by Cuming Walters (1899). This is of the esoteric order, of which Dowden had previously noted some seven examples. Mr Walters thinks a few Sonnets may connect with Southampton; but interprets the mass as the expression of the poet’s “all-consuming desire for immortality. Begin as he may with his theme, he almost invariably merges into allegory, and represents himself as the contestant of death. Bodily death he does not fear: oblivion he dreads. He therefore argues incessantly on the course he shall pursue to defy the ravages of time and prevent the loss of reputation. . . . The two series of poems are almost wholly allegorical and antithetical.”

As this thesis will not be dealt with in our study of the data, it may be fitting to remark that it has the merit of originality, and that, while it entirely ignores a mass of countervailing evidence, both in the Sonnets and in the Plays, it is at least pretexted by the iteration in the former of the promises of immortality to an ostensible recipient; and it takes account of that constant sense of the flight of time which Professor Masson has justly stressed as a special note in Shakespeare. But as a theory of the Sonnets the “elucidation” does but make darkness visible. They are accounted for as “preliminary studies for work which was maturing,” in the face of the fact that no such use was made of them. The determining motive of the entire theory appears to be simple aversion from “the loathsome assumption that Shakespeare had a mistress,

¹ Art. on Shakespeare’s Sonnets, 1898, rep. in *Ephemera Critica*, 1901, p. 235.

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at all." But this utter arbitrariness is the specialty of all the esoteric theories.

39. We have it again, with a difference, in the 'New Study of the Sonnets of Shakespeare' published in 1900 by Mr. Parke Godwin of New York. Mr. Godwin supplies yet another new "order" and a new chronology; and in the matter of interpretation reverts to the symbolistic method, to the extent even of reinstating Barnstorff's "Mr. William himself." Mr. Godwin's elucidation of the Sonnets, however, may be described as eclectic. The "central" Sonnet, 77, he takes as "explanatory" of the whole, and places first; a few he groups as "independents or solitaries"; then come (rearranged) the seventeen "marrying" Sonnets grouped as "A Plea for Creative or Poetic Art"; then a series of thirty-nine youthful "Love Poems" (including many commonly taken as addressed to the patron), which are assigned to the Stratford period and connected with Anne Hathaway; while thirty-nine are liberally assigned to the Dark Lady; leaving fifty-one setting forth "The Poet's Communion with the Higher Muse."

. Such theories as the last, and Mr. Godwin's interpretation of the seventeen matrimonial Sonnets, reducing the primary personages to a process of self-exhortation by a young poet dramatising his poetic ideals, are an ever-recurring feature in this literature. Professor R. M. Alden in 1916 noted some seven or eight of such esoteric theories in addition to the seven or eight previously noted by Dowden. They thus bulk largely in the mass of speculation on the Sonnets.

40. Professional criticism, as a rule, naturally and justifiably ignores them as insusceptible of scientific discussion. It would, however, be an optimistic exaggeration to say that professional criticism in its turn is much concerned for precision of method. Professor Ward attempted no searching inquiry on

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the biographical and bibliographical problems of the Sonnets in his massive and learned 'History of English Dramatic Literature,' contenting himself, in his second edition, with affirming that the identity of "Mr. W. H." with Pembroke had been shown "with a probability very near to certainty," while declining to accept any theory of the Dark Lady.¹ Thus he in effect committed himself to the Pembroke theory while dismissing the new data which had been commonly supposed to give the theory a consistency it had before lacked.

41. That theory, however, never carried all before it. In the compact and well-meditated introduction to the Sonnets in Professor Herford's 'Eversley' edition of Shakespeare (1900), it is criticised and rejected; the Southampton solution being preferred as one which "sufficiently satisfies the meagre biographical data of the Sonnets"; with the admission that "its acceptance leaves many problems still unsolved. The dark lady remains as mysterious as before. The determination of date is not altogether clear." But "There is a strong presumption that the Sonnets—Shakespeare's consummate achievement in lyric poetry—belong to this [1590-7] period of pronounced lyrical energies. In particular, Sonnets 1-26 have unmistakable affinities of style and motive with the VENUS AND ADONIS."

With these judicial pronouncements are bound up the usual commitment to the view that "*All* the Sonnets" up to 126 "are addressed to a youth"; and the salient incongruities which on that view they present are surveyed without any suggestion that they are incongruities at all. No question of authenticity is ever raised; and so meretricious a Sonnet as No. 99, treated as unquestionably addressed to a man, is praised for "richness and splendour of imagery," with the two

¹ Work cited, ed. 1899, ii, 32.

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which precede. It would not have been surprising if, in view of this constant insistence on the destination of all the first 126 Sonnets to a man, the theory of Butler had met with more acceptance than it actually had. The late William Sharp, who in 1885 had repelled it as put by Chasles, gave me to understand some years later that he had come to accept it.

CHAPTER III

TWENTIETH-CENTURY STUDY

THE chances are that the plethora of speculation and debate in the last decades of the past century had rather a sating than a stimulating effect on the majority of readers. Every theorist had assailed or tacitly antagonised nearly every other, and none had shaped an unassailable solution. Butler had contrived to make the problem newly malodorous for readers, though his interpretation has probably had some little private currency ever since the day of Benson, if not before. The Fitton theory naturally had preference in *fin de siècle* discussion as a more tolerable form of scandal. But the whole debate seems for the time to have been felt to be at a dead end: and for some years the reigning "problem" was that of the Baconian theory, which assigned to the author of the *NOVUM ORGANUM* the authorship of all the Sonnets¹ as well as all the Plays ascribed to Shakespeare—together with as much more of the literature of the Tudor and Stuart period as the speculative profligacy of any individual Baconian could suggest.

I. Soon, however, the problems of the Sonnets came again to the front. In 1903, Mr. Courthope, in

¹ Judge Nathaniel Holmes (*The Authorship of Shakespeare*, 1866) had no doubt that Bacon wrote the Sonnets. "The similitudes of thought, style, and diction are such as to put at rest all question on that head." I learn from Dr. W. J. Rolfe's *Life of Shakespeare*, (1902, p. 363) that in 1887 another American judge, Hosmer by name, of California, published a work showing that "the poems were addressed by Bacon to Shakespeare, and that the former, making over the plays to the latter, gave his directions concerning the concealment of their true authorship. The Sonnets contain impersonations of Truth, Beauty, Thought, the Drama, etc."

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the fourth volume of his 'History of English Poetry,' declared strongly for the "personal" view of them, arguing, for instance (iv, 36), that Sonnet 104 could not have been sent to the patron *as such*, but must be read as from friend to friend—this in repudiation of Lee's verdict of calculated flattery. Conservative as always, the historian admitted no doubt as to the traditional text. Nor was Dr. Richard Garnett more subversive in his treatment of the Sonnets in the 'English Literature' compiled by him and Dr. Gosse (1903). Raising no question as to authenticity, and assenting to the assumption that the main mass of the Sonnets are addressed to one person, the accomplished critic devoted himself mainly to an argument for a "late" dating of the entire collection, thus connecting it with Pembroke, though, like a number of other adherents to that hypothesis, he declined to accept Mary Fitton. Naturally, the internal grounds for an early dating of the matrimonial Sonnets are ignored.

More searching, on the bibliographical side, is the handling of the Sonnets in the excellent little compilation of Thomas Seecombe and J. W. Allen on 'The Age of Shakespeare' (also 1903). The bulk of the series is there assigned to the sonneteering period 1593-7 in respect of internal evidence, the two patron theories being alike dismissed as guesswork; and the tradition is defied to the extent of noting (1) that the order is not chronological, (2) that many of those Sonnets taken as addressed to a man may be to a woman, and (3) that they are certainly not all inspired by the same person. It is the more remarkable that no ground for suspicion as to authenticity is recognised, even as to the most trivial Sonnets; though the critical estimate is discriminating. Thorpe is presented as little worthy of credit; but his collection is taken as canonical.

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2. Very different was the message that came from Germany (1903) in one of the sections of Dr. Theodor Eichhoff's series of essays on 'Unser Shakespeare.' There, in application of a subjective test which he has, not uncritically, applied to the Plays, that devoted Shakespearean summarily dismissed as valueless, or worse, the great mass of the Sonnets, finding only sixteen worthy of the Master. His so-called "*Edelsteine*," arranged in an order of his own, are Nos. 27, 29, 44, 52, 71, 75, 76, 91, 97, 105, 109, 110, 111, 115, 116, 129. Needless to say, Dr. Eichhoff's tests are ethico-psychic, though he would also claim that as such they are literary.¹ But when we note that he acclaims 29 but drops 30; takes 44 but ignores 45, which connects with it; puts aside so beautiful a Sonnet as 73, with 74, which connects with it, yet adopts 75; gives honour to 115, yet drops 107, what can be said save that his subjective preferences are incompatible with those of most other students of all countries?

They have, so far as I am aware, not even been discussed by English critics; and they are indeed indiscussible save by way of indicating objective evidence which Dr. Eichhoff ignores, and subjective tests which clash with his. The relative slightness of theme of the matrimonial Sonnets, for instance, cannot be held to mark them as non-Shakespearean when we compare them with the themes and the execution of the Poems; and the grounds for connecting them with Southampton are among the main data we possess for any decision as to authorship. On the other hand, the consensus of criticism in praise of a number of the Sonnets which Dr. Eichhoff dismisses as valueless is such as to make his selection a mere ukase, in which *stat pro ratione*

¹ In a letter to me (1923) the veteran critic has given his matured opinion that those sixteen Sonnets "bei wirklichen Vertiefung in ihren Inhalt und ihre Form . . . die Lektüre der andern Sonnette zur Unmöglichkeit machen."

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voluntas. When we come to attempt for ourselves a discrimination of authorship in terms of technique, purport, and diction, his pronouncement will, unfortunately, hinder rather than help us.

3. Meantime, much more restrained speculation has passed with little notice. In 1904 appeared Mrs. C. C. Stopes's edition of the Sonnets, with an introduction in which she restated the Hervey solution of the "W. H." enigma; this, however, without securing any professional attention for it, save in respect of Professor Brandl's acceptance in his German translation of the Sonnets (1913), or affecting the English disposition to harp on the Pembroke solution in disregard of all the objections which had been restated by Professor Gollancz. The same year saw the issue of the well-annotated edition of the Sonnets by Dean Beeching (Boston, 1904), in which the prominent theories were judicially considered, and left unaccepted. Mrs. Stopes's edition being contemporaneous, Beeching notes only, in respect of her previously published views, that she "divides her conjecture between William Hunnis, a gentleman of Queen Elizabeth's chapel royal, who died in 1597, and some other William Herbert, not the Earl of Pembroke." In her volume on 'Shakespeare's Environment' (1913), Mrs. Stopes shows Hunnis to have figured in the generation of Mary Tudor, and excludes him from any connection with the Sonnets, standing finally to the Hervey theory.

The Dean, however, had noted the Hervey theory as put by Fleay, and he alludes to it with the sole comment: "*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*." Thus did one of the most scholarly and sensible Shakespeareans of his time, after carefully weighing the Pembroke and other theories which vainly attempt to identify "W. H.," dismiss with a smile a theory incomparably better worth examination. *Trahit sua*. There is a *voluptas* of negation, as of inquiry. His attempts to

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date the style of the Sonnets are at first promising; but they unaccountably ignore the number of parallels in the earlier Plays; and the decision that the 1597 date for I HENRY IV "is beyond dispute" leaves the problem very ill-settled. For an earlier date there are strong arguments, in particular the fact that this play has the minimum percentage of double-endings. The main value of Beeching's edition thus lies in its critical discussion of obscure passages and doubtful readings, which is admittedly done with much sagacity. Yet the present writer, here following Charles Lamb, and coinciding with Tyler and Wyndham and many more, is opposed to the Dean in his interpretation of Sonnet 110, where he follows Boswell and Massey, and has the magistral support of Dr. A. C. Bradley. So many grounds are there for conflict in this field; and so much reason is there for a judicial reconsideration of all. Beeching and Dr. Bradley pass confident judgments *ex cathedra*. It will be part of our business to weigh them.

4. In the same year with the editions of Mrs. Stopes and Dean Beeching appeared the second volume of M. Jusserand's valuable 'Histoire Littéraire du Peuple Anglais,' a much more ripely studied performance than the brilliant survey of Taine; and the treatment in it of the Sonnets¹ by so accomplished a student and publicist, deeply intimate with English literature yet standing outside of English prejudices, could not but be recognised as critically important. As might have been expected, it was not seriously revolutionary; though the acute French critic would adopt neither the Southampton nor the Pembroke theory. Justly remarking, as indeed others had done before him, on the absence from the Sonnets of any allusion to the warlike and other adventures of Southampton, M. Jusserand, accepting the ordinary view that the first

¹ Vol. cited, pp. 637-56.

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126 Sonnets are addressed to a man, decided for a wealthy youth of the middle class, offering, however, no explanation of his apparent celebration by "rival poets," or of the peculiarly systematic invitation given to him, in the opening Sonnets, to marry.

For the rest, M. Jusserand accepts the mass as "bien de Shakespeare"; regards the Quarto as having had no contemporary success inasmuch as there was no reissue; and draws the inference that there could have been no outside suspicion of its involving any personal scandals. That it might have been suppressed at an early stage of the sale does not occur to the critic as even a possibility. In the Sonnets he finds, somewhat as in the Plays, "a mixture of marvels and uglinesses, of pearls and of mud," adding, as so many English critics have done, that these poems have in them something morbid; though he decides that Shakespeare soon recovered from his depressions, and proceeded to make on his contemporaries an impression chiefly of gaiety.

5. Alongside of such cautious speculation on uncautiously accepted tradition appeared the work of Dr. Charles Creighton, 'Shakespeare's Story of his Life' (1904),¹ which lays a new course in the "fearless old fashion" of a less disillusioned age. Set to studying the Sonnets by a gift of Butler's book, Dr. Creighton, ready enough to find "a story" in them, soon decided that Butler's story "would never do," and proceeded diligently to build one for himself. It starts with the discovery that "A man in hew, all *Hews* in his controlling," referred to Herbert, one of whose courtesy titles was Lord Fitzhew. Massey's earlier pronouncement, that the reference is to Essex, who had for one of his titles *Ewe*, is of course tranquilly ignored, as is the old suggestion that *Hews* is an ana-

¹ The first three chapters had appeared, in a less expanded form, in *Blackwood*, May and June, 1901.

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gram for Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. On this secure footing, Dr. Creighton proceeds to make a multitude of further discoveries. The italicised *Rose* refers to Herbert's title of Lord Ros; and Mary Fitton is newly attested in respect of a ballad which connected her with "the clown," who, of course, must be Shakespeare, though the clown Kemp had dedicated to her a booklet.

Still more exciting are the revelations reached as to Shakespeare and others. For Dr. Creighton, the Plays are a series of nods and winks and hints with regard to contemporaries. Mary Fitton is Mariana in the moated grange. Prospero in *THE TEMPEST* is of course Shakespeare; Gonzalo is Fulke Greville; Antonio, Lord Southampton; and Francisco, Antonio's attendant, is Francis Bacon. Barnabe Barnes, again, is the original of Parolles, of Armado, and of Pistol; but he was also Shakespeare's "devil" or "plotter," supplying him with scenarios for his plays. As to the Sonnets, the most impressive discovery is that at the death of Spenser Shakespeare aspired to the poet-laureateship; and that the "rival poet" Sonnets refer to his acute disappointment on that score. Space fails for any fuller indications of Dr. Creighton's roving flight. A few years later he published 'An Allegory of Othello' (1912) and 'An Allegory of King Lear' (1913), which may be said to be the fit consummation of his hermeneutic method. In the latter work, "Gloucester is Monasticism," Edmund=Thomas Cromwell, Burgundy is Erasmus, the Earl of Kent is Sir Thomas More; and "the tragedy of Lear and his daughters is an allegory of the Reformation in its peculiarly English form." One can but add, *Selah*.

6. The even current of relatively cautious scholarship is resumed in W. J. Craig's 'Little Quarto' edition of the Sonnets in 1905, the veteran Shakespearean putting into brief space the result of his ripe

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meditations. In so far as they are speculative, they are less illuminating than might have been expected. Holding that "the first 126 sonnets anyone can see are addressed to a male friend," and that "the style of the majority . . . resembles that of Shakespeare's more mature productions," as *OTHELLO* or *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*, he yet reasons that the *EDWARD III* echoes suggest priority for the Sonnets, with the corollary "that they were handed about in manuscript, and that the author of *EDWARD III* had seen them." This dates the Sonnets in question, for Craig, before 1596, the date of the printing of the play, which is announced on the title-page as having been "sundrie times plaied about the citie of London," and is by style traceable to the later years of Marlowe and Greene. And still he claims only that "*some* of the Sonnets *appear* to have been published before" 1598.

The Pembroke theory, nevertheless, he pronounces to have been "far too hastily" accepted by some recent critics, though he leans to the Chapman theory in regard to the rival poet. On the other hand, holding it as "nearly certain that *the* friend's name was Will," he stood in doubt as to the Southampton connection, and did not even associate himself with the view of Jusserand and others that the recipient was "some friend of good station in life, though not noble," a solution which, he saw, "increases the difficulty" as to the rival poet. We are left with the sober doubts of an old scholar as against all confident theories, yet with some commitments which in turn incur objection no less justly. On the side of literary criticism there is the same judicial balancing of claim for the sincerity and splendour of the best of the Sonnets against indiscriminate praise of the whole mass.

7. In the same year with Craig's edition of the Sonnets appeared Max J. Wolff's studious German monograph on Shakespeare (München, 2 Bde.), in which an early

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date for the matrimonial Sonnets is quite definitely insisted on (i, 292), but, curiously enough, for the same bad reason given by Craig, that the EDWARD III lines in Sonnets 94, 142, prove the author of the play to have seen the Sonnets in manuscript. Craig thought the play "might" have been touched by Shakespeare; Wolff offers no such compromise, but takes for granted that the extremely bad adaptation in Sonnet 142 of a fairly good line in the play is really a matter of the playwright improving greatly on the Sonnet—though Wolff does not directly say so. A sound chronological position is thus vitiated by disregard of the internal evidence which dates EDWARD III, as it stands, not later than 1592.

For the rest, Wolff declines to be captured by the Pembroke theory, finding in the Southampton connection the only solution compatible with the obvious earliness of the matrimonial Sonnets; and earns our praise by recognising, with Taine and a few others, that a number of the Sonnets in the main section are really addressed not to a man but to a woman (i, 293). English criticism has been on this point predominantly impercipient; and the better judgment of the German critic ought to be put on record. Wolff, however, makes no inquiries as to authenticity beyond the usual dismissal of the trifles near the end.

8. One of the obvious requisites of Shakespeare study, in each generation, is a compact manual embodying the accepted results of scholarly investigation on the whole *corpus* printed as Shakespeare's. Fleay's Manual (1876), hastily written and embodying a number of errors which, by reason of stereotyping, could not be rectified, had no rival save the more careful but more restricted primer of Dowden; and a new treatise was much to be desired in the interests of education. That task was usefully taken up by Mr. Morton Luce in his Handbook to Shakespeare (1906),

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where, after an interesting criticism on the *LUCRECE* as "far inferior to the *VENUS*," and on the form of the Sonnets as relatively weak, though they are in poetic quality the best of the period, we have a rational discussion of the problems they raise; with such findings as these: "The sonnets . . . are at least to some extent conventional, artificial—a fashion; and in subject and sentiment they are personal or pseudo-personal, possibly effusive, perhaps insincere. Just as, though a euphuist, he condemned euphuism, so as a sonnet-writer he almost despised sonneteering . . . (L. L. L., I, ii, 190; IV, iii, 158). Shakespeare seldom mentions the sonnet without some accent of contempt. On the poet's own showing, therefore, the sonnets of the period—his own included—are to be read with caution."

Still, "there is no reason why he should not have hidden his very heart in sonnets conventional even to a purpose. . . . This, then, as I think, is the problem of the sonnets: some were exercises; some were written in friendly rivalry (*MUCH ADO*, v, ii, 4, 5); some rang changes on themes present to the poet in his other work; some were 'occasional' pieces; but many were either adapted or composed so that within their form of artifice they half revealed and half concealed a soul of intense reality." But as to the "begetter" and the rival poet and the Dark Lady, Mr. Luce is not merely agnostic. "It might be some slight gain to literature, but I could not wish to see the veil removed, whether from the fiction or the personality."

In a later volume on 'Shakespeare, the Man and his Work' (1913) Mr. Luce devotes a tantalising essay to "Some New Facts about the Sonnets." The only facts which appear to emerge are the admitted incompatibilities of a number of the Sonnets which ostensibly deal with given situations. Beyond an apparent implication that we may be justified in

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disbelieving Shakespeare's Sonnet testimony against himself, and a reiterated claim that the poet "accepted the standard theology of the day," the essay is suggestive without being illuminative.

9. The attitude of Sir E. K. Chambers, in his introduction to the Sonnets in the 'Red Letter' edition of Shakespeare (1906), is not greatly different, save that he emphatically dissents from Lee's verdict that "genuine emotion or the writer's personal experience very rarely inspired the Elizabethan sonnet, and Shakespeare's SONNETS proved no exception to the rule . . . there is no proof that he is doing more in these sonnets than produce dramatically the illusion of a personal confession." Upon this the 'Red Letter' editor comments: "What a curious insensibility to the *cri du cœur* of poetry it reveals! Here are souls that pulse and words that burn." He too, however, admits some of the Sonnets to be "trivial and occasional enough"; and he appears to argue that the special virtue of the sonnet is to realise Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity," which hardly corresponds to the *cri du cœur*. Nor does he say how often the *cri* is to be heard.

This inexactitude of claim and generality of objection has been the bane of the debate from the beginning. Any committee of educated Civil Servants in any Government office (themselves not editors or theorists) could have done more in a month for this inquiry than had been achieved by the succession of editors in a century up to 1906. Such a committee would first have examined all the unquantified predicates, then put them in the waste-basket and proceeded to tabulate the Sonnets in respect of their characteristics, noting how many were fitly to be held as addressed to a male; how many could be fairly regarded as cries of the heart; how many could not rationally be so described (beginning with the first seventeen, considered as commissioned);

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how many might or might not be conceived as possibly written by way of mouthpiece for others; and in regard to how many there might be raised the question of non-Shakespearean authorship. Such a committee, without uttering *cris du cœur* of their own, would probably be as percipient of them in poetry as the general run of editors and professors. It might even have critical vision for aspects of versification, phrase, and diction.

10. In the absence of such businesslike inquiry, we have certainly had some brilliant books. When, after a generation of postponement, there appeared (1907) in the 'English Men of Letters' series a monograph on Shakespeare, it was naturally turned to with avidity. The cause of the long delay in dealing with the greatest of English writers, in a series instituted in the 'seventies, had been, it is understood, the difficulty of finding an exponent at once distinguished, competent, and willing. George Eliot, Morley, and others had declined—wisely, in respect of lack of special preparation. Professor Walter Raleigh, who had done no important work on Shakespeare, was eligible in respect of good academic status and a distinguished style, though that had incurred criticism as being over-anxious for distinction. It is conceivable that he, too, had some sense of the danger of producing, in what was to be a lasting form, admitting of no improvement in later editions, a treatise full of commitments upon issues of critical scholarship which were likely to undergo revision. But Raleigh seems to have had little concern, as he had little critical vision, for the unsound elements in the literary tradition; and he produced a book almost defiantly orthodox, where a more searching mind might have seen reason to admit many grounds for doubt, and to leave a number of serious issues open.

His monograph is thus for the most part only a

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well-written exposition of "canonical" views on the canon, with moral and literary estimates adjusted as well as might be to the most questionable of the old documentary assumptions. On that side it might as well have been written by Dowden thirty years before, when, as a matter of fact, Dowden produced a noticeably cautious *Primer of Shakespeare*. It could but strive to be effective on the side of freshness of estimate and vividness and pungency of phrase, for which Raleigh had the qualifications of a free-spoken humour and a turn of style that had latterly been chastened to relative sobriety, though never cleared of preciousness.¹ Thus the orthodox reader had the awakening thrill of being told that "Shakespeare was a whole-hearted lover of pleasure, in himself and others"; that his "villains and evil characters are *all* self-absorbed and miserable and retrospective"; that "the audience asked for bloodshed, and he gave them *HAMLET*. They asked for foolery and he gave them *KING LEAR*"—telling exaggerations, stimulating paradoxes, arresting shocks. Professing a sound contempt for fantastic theorising, the critic suggests that Polonius may be partly a portrait of Shakespeare's father.

The critical difficulties created for himself by such an artist become acute when he reaches the problem of the Sonnets. For Raleigh as a sound conservative, Shakespeare must have practically written the whole Folio; though he makes loosely inconsistent concessions in view of accumulating opinion to the contrary.² Thus we are told (p. 84) that Shakespeare's "early play of *TITUS ANDRONICUS*, *which is like the poems*, shows how strangely hard-hearted this [youthful] love of beauty can be," after we had been assured

¹ *E. g.*, "When he collects his might and stands dilated" (p. 7).

² The most interesting is the suggestion (p. 115) that, in *Timon*, Shakespeare "permitted another to expand" a discarded fragment—this after scoffs at all theories of "the inevitable collaborator."

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(p. 62) that "the vast circle of his experience was kept true by the stability of his first affections." The repelling character of the choice of the scoundrelly Bertram for a hero, again, is fully admitted; but with the salve (p. 139): "Would not Shakespeare have defended his characters with something of the large humorous tolerance displayed by Falstaff towards his ragged regiment?" Whereupon we are moved to ask ourselves whether it really matters anything to us *what* Shakespeare may have felt in writing his Sonnets or anything else. If he is but a plexus of moral anomalies, why not say so once for all, and cease to speculate and palliate?

To a certain extent, this is the course taken by Raleigh with the Sonnets; but he adds confident verdicts. He not merely leaves the primary problems aside as unsettled; he flatly affirms (p. 87) that "it has never been seriously questioned that *all* the Sonnets are by Shakespeare"—a proposition which must have been emphatically denied by hundreds of his first readers. By implication, then, all the Sonnets come within his praise as "sincere" and as "holding their place with the greatest poetry of the world"—a gratuitous folly as regards a number of them. The judgment that they are "conventional" only inasmuch as all art observes conventions of form, and that "there is nothing else conventional about them, except their critics," is on the same plane of extravagance. Perforce, we then have contradictory pronouncements. "The workings of [the poet's] mind are laid bare" (p. 91); "Shakespeare was not a puny imitative rhymester" (p. 92); "With a *magniloquence that was only half-hearted* he promises his friend" a perpetuity of fame (p. 92).

In the end, then, we have from the critic, in effect, only one more "conventional" tribute of slightly discriminating acclamation, unconventional only in

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the skilled quality of its rhetoric. As on the Plays, so on the Sonnets, we get in the most prominent Shakespeare monograph of our time a quantity of well-phrased appreciation; but no light on the problems which press themselves with a growing insistence on those who are concerned to "think new and think true" on the perplexingly composite aspects of the mass of work ascribed to "the greatest of all writers."

11. In 1908 appeared the edition of 'Shakespeare's Complete Sonnets' by Mr. C. M. Walsh, a collection embodying the Sonnets which are found in the Plays, and arranging all in a new order according to subject. The most valuable element in the book, however, apart from the notes, is the introduction, which very judiciously surveys most of the current theories, without touching on the revived view, put by Lee, of the Thorpe Sonnets in mass as literary exercises in a prevailing mode. Mr. Walsh usefully challenged the unitary assumptions of all the other factions alike, denying that the first 126 Sonnets can be assumed to be all addressed to one man: pointing out that while both Pembroke and Southampton, as patrons, may have been recipients, yet others may also have been; and insisting that "Mr. W. H." cannot be identified in the existing state of our knowledge. The agnostic attitude thus taken up has fitly influenced much of the more scholarly discussion that has followed.

But Lee's substantial rejection of all biographical interpretation has never satisfied the majority even of those who recognise its probable applicability to some or many of the Sonnets; and the reasonable assumption that many are outflows from personal experience is shared by critics with different standpoints in other regards. There is much to be said, further, for the view set forth by Gerald Massey, that some or many of the Sonnets may have been written *for* others; though his schema is incapable of proof. And these convictions

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and surmises inevitably inspire new speculation, up to the point at which conflicting theories stall each other for lack of power to exclude each other.

12. Upon such a situation supervened the sensational work of Mr. Frank Harris on 'The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life-Story' (1909), an expansion of a series of articles contributed by its author to *The Saturday Review* during his period of editorship of that periodical (1896-8). Like Dr. Creighton, Mr. Harris "corroborates" the Mary Fitton theory. "I bring to this theory," he writes, "fresh corroboration from the plays." Where Dr. Creighton oscillates between a vision of allegory and one of personal libel in the Plays, Mr. Harris finds Shakespeare in a multitude of his own characters. Thus Biron is Shakespeare; and Antonio (in the *MERCHANT*), "it must be confessed, is a very charming sketch of Shakespeare when he was about thirty years of age": he is also Hamlet and Romeo and Macbeth and the Duke in *TWELFTH NIGHT*, and almost anybody else you please; though we are warned off some by the intimation that the dramatist "tried now and again to give life to puppets like Coriolanus and Iago." When a character is too wildly incompatible with a pretence that it embodies Shakespeare's self, it is necessarily to be dismissed as a "puppet," with, apparently, all the women.

Naturally, such an interpreter finds¹ that "The crisis of Shakespeare's life, the hour of agony and bloody sweat when his weakness found him out and life's handiwork proved too heavy even for his strength—that is the subject of the Sonnets . . . 'Love is my sin,' he says; 'Love of love and her soft hours' was his weakness: passion the snare that meshed his soul. No wonder Antony cries:

'Whither hast thou led me, Egypt?'

¹ Possibly Mr. Harris got his first hint from Taine. See above, p. 22.

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for his gipsy led Shakespeare from shame to shame, to the verge of madness. "The Sonnets give us the story, the whole terrible, sinful, magical story of Shakespeare's passion." Thus, as Shakespeare is to be identified in most of the men in the plays, so a Dark Lady is to be found in most of the women. And of course she must be Mary Fitton. Resenting the "prudery" of his countrymen, Mr. Harris has brought to the exposition of Shakespeare the more stimulating principle of prurience, parading as ethical and psychological insight.

It is a rather notable fact in our literary history that the Shakespeare-studies of Mr. Harris set up a wave of enthusiasm alike among a few men of letters who had critically studied Shakespeare and among more who had not, the secret being apparently the resolute energy with which Mr. Harris applied alternately the tar brush and the whitewash brush to his subject. Dr. A. C. Bradley, in a footnote to his lecture on 'Shakespeare the Man' in his 'Oxford Lectures on Poetry' (1909), anticipated the reappearance in that year of the *Saturday Review* papers by the remark that "It is a great pity that the articles are not collected and published in a book."¹ One's difficulty is to divine what Dr. Bradley, with his high sanity, found "valuable" in their ideas. It is understood that the applause they thus elicited was not sustained after Mr. Harris published his memorable revelation of the remarkable domestic confidences declared by him to have been made to him in his youth by Carlyle—a disclosure which throws such a suggestive light on his interpretation of the character and the work of Shakespeare.

It might suffice in the present connection to say that the hypothesis of a penetration of the soul of Shake-

¹ "My book on Shakespeare," writes Mr. Harris in the introduction to his play, *Shakespeare and his Love* (1910), "was many years in type before it found a publisher." Apparently Dr. Bradley's notice helped.

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speare by the instincts of the author of the connubial confessions of Carlyle is "a thing imagination boggles at." To any but an impressionist the entire thesis that the dramatist puts his own *character* into his dramatic persons is a mere critical insanity in that it involves the same thesis for every other dramatist, or novelist, or narrative poet, from Homer to Conrad. On that view, everything being put in one category, there is no specification of anything. Homer puts *himself* into Achilles, Thersites, Priam, Nestor, and Helen. The philosopheme of Maurice Morgann, stating an æsthetic fact, is made a meaningless enormity. For any competent critic, it might be supposed to be self-evident that, as Nestor could not picture Nestor, so a Richard Second could not dramatise himself, or a Romeo pen ROMEO, or Hamlet HAMLET. But it has to be recorded that the publisher of 'The Man Shakespeare' was enabled to claim "over 6,000 lines of favourable criticism of this book"; and that *The Nation*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Outlook*, *The Observer*, and *The Daily Telegraph* vied in their rapturous eulogies of it as "by far the most original, suggestive writing on Shakespeare that our times have known, or are likely to know"; "a brilliant and fascinating *tour de force*," with "critical merit of the first order" and "permanent importance"; "the most illuminating criticism of Shakespeare that has ever been written"; opening "a line of study that was practically unknown"; "a splendid, even a magnetic book"; and "a very remarkable contribution to our knowledge about Shakespeare."

The last certificate came from so sober a critic as Mr. W. L. Courtney. Mr. Arnold Bennett, for his part, found that the work of Mr. Harris "marks an epoch."¹

¹ This appears to have referred specially to Mr. Harris's articles on "The Women of Shakespeare." See his introduction to *Shakespeare and his Love*, p. viii.

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It has destroyed nearly all previous criticism, and will be the parent of nearly all the Shakespearean criticism of the future." The impulse set up by that verdict, to invite novelists not to assume that they are fit oracles on matters outside their scope, is certainly checked by the professional verdict of Sir E. K. Chambers that Shakespeare wrote *ROMEO AND JULIET* because of a perturbing love experience through which he had just passed.¹ But while some professional criticism thus keeps in countenance the engaging nescience with which the majority of our reviewers approach all matters of Shakespearean scholarship, Mr. Bennett's prediction has happily not been thus far fulfilled. Our novelists have indeed appointed themselves our prophets; but they are not yet our lawgivers. The tar and whitewash method of literary portraiture has at least not yet become dominant;² and there are even signs of a suspicion that Shakespeare after all is not "easier to be played on than a pipe," whether by clean or unclean hands, and that when the Higher Charlatanism has shot all its bolts it may be useful to set to work in the humbler fashion dictated by the canons of science and scholarship.

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part III, pp. 192-5.

² Even Mr. G. B. Shaw, whom Mr. Harris claimed to have convinced, with Mr. Bennett and Mr. Richard Middleton, of the truth of his conception of Shakespeare, was moved (in a rejoinder in *The Nation*, December 14, 1910, to Mr. Harris's lengthy attack upon him in the Introduction to the play *Shakespeare and his Love*) to point out that Mr. Harris's pretence of deducing Shakespeare's sexual obsession from the Plays and Sonnets is absolutely rebutted by those documents. Hamlet, Macbeth, Cæsar, Augustus, Richard, and Antonio are alike uninfluenced in action by love; Coriolanus is deflected only by the love of his mother; Beatrice and Benedick are fooled into love; a dozen sympathetic characters in the Plays laugh at love; and the Dark Lady in the Sonnets is more reviled than adored. "Mr. Harris's changeling," writes Mr. Shaw, "is not Shakespeare: he is Guy de Maupassant." This is the *mot juste*. Of course, it does not commit Mr. Shaw to recantation of his doom of Shakespeare for having no "Message."

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13. It is reassuring to recall that Professor A. C. Bradley's 'Oxford Lectures on Poetry,' including that on 'Shakespeare the Man,' appeared in the same year with Mr. Harris's published volume, 'Shakespeare the Man,' to which the Professor gave such a surprising welcome. Between the lecture and the book there is a difference not to be expressed—the difference between finely and sanely felt literary discrimination and the blare of the theory-monger whose inspiration and objective are alike "sensation." Dr. Bradley's Shakespeare and Mr. Harris's are of two moral worlds; and their methods are of two æsthetic worlds. Every reader of 'Shakespearean Tragedy' knew in advance that no living critic could outgo its author in sure penetration of any Shakespeare text; and in the lecture under notice we have the most delicately balanced commentary on the main body of the Sonnets considered as addressed to one young man.

As to the Sonnets in the mass, it amounts in substance to the view that the more serious are to be reckoned in the main "personal"; and for this an excellent reason is given: "No capable poet, much less a Shakespeare, intending to produce a merely 'dramatic' series of poems, would dream of inventing a story like that of these sonnets, or, even if he did, of treating it as they treat it. The story is very odd and unattractive. Such capacities as it has are slightly developed."¹ As to the recipient, Dr. Bradley sees that in Sonnets 109, 110, 120, Shakespeare cannot be "addressing a great nobleman." He assumes, however, that they are addressed to a man—inferentially "Mr. W. H." This adherence to the general assumption of unity of address throughout the 126 Sonnets, and the acceptance without question of the entire Thorpe Quarto as of Shakespeare's writing, will probably be found to be the

¹ Vol. cited, p. 331.

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grounds on which Dr. Bradley's estimate may clash with future criticism.

14. Mr. Oliphant Smeaton, with the monograph of Raleigh before him, wisely set himself, in the volume on Shakespeare which he compiled for the "Everyman" series of biographies (1911), to the task of supplying guidance and information in place of authoritarian estimate. Thus his book, like the Primer of Dowden and the Handbook of Morton Luce, has served very usefully to introduce young students to the technical study of Shakespeare's versification; and though, as was to be expected, it is substantially conservative on the problems of authorship, it is at times instructively discriminative on that head (*e.g.*, on the *SHREW*), even though he may be held to misapply his own verse-tests by taking as "run-on" lines some of which the *rhythm* is stiffly line-ended. Unfortunately he has seen fit to pronounce (p. 78) that the chapters of Mr. Frank Harris contain "a solid and important element of autobiographic fact"—citing in particular the argument from *THE TWO GENTLEMEN*, a play not of Shakespeare's planning, and containing little of his writing.¹

As to the Sonnets, Mr. Smeaton makes the old mistake (p. 466) of saying that before 1601 Lord Herbert was "Mr. William Herbert"; but he seeks to compound a feud by avowing at once a personal conviction of the identity of Southampton with the "dear friend" and an inclination to believe that Mary Fitton was the Dark Lady. More important is the judicious pronouncement (p. 467) that "The 'Sonnets' principally belong to Shakespeare's 'First' literary period, when his style was inspired by lyrical ideals. That there are one or two Sonnets of a later date is

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part II. Orthodox and heterodox readers alike will repugn Mr. Smeaton's rash endorsement of the views of Richard Simpson and Mr. Tucker Brooke as to Shakespeare's having had a hand in the "apocryphal" plays.

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probably true, but the majority of them belong to that epoch of 'immaturity' when there was a distinct element of flamboyance to be traced in his work, and when rhyme, the end-stopped line, and the pause falling with measured and regular beat on the same foot, imparted that quality of monotony to his verse which is at times characteristic of the dramas of this period."

I regret having in this connection to demur to the statements alike of Mr. Smeaton and of Mr. Luce as to an end-stopped quality and a fixed pedal movement being predominant in Shakespeare's early verse. The verse of the first scene in the ERRORS, and in the whole of the DREAM, repels these verdicts; and only by faulty scanning (p. 52) of the first line in LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST does Mr. Smeaton bear out his judgment there.

15. In 1911 appeared the most scholarly and graceful of all the critical appreciations of the Sonnets, the lecture devoted to them in Professor Mackail's admirable "Lectures on Poetry." Apart from the suggestion that Part II is less homogeneous than Part I, and that two or four of its Sonnets may be non-Shakespearean, the bibliographical treatment of the Quarto is conservative. Of Part I the Professor sees "no reason to doubt that they were arranged by Shakespeare, or at all events that they left his hands, in their present order, and that this order is substantially the order of their composition"; though at the same time he is convinced that the Quarto "was printed from a rough MS. containing alterations, erasures, and in some cases alternative readings," and that "there are indications, not very certain, but highly probable, that the MS. before the printers was not all in the same handwriting."

In addition to this general acceptance of the authenticity of Part I, there are incidental endorsements of

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authenticity which challenge criticism, and will be subjected to respectful examination hereinafter. But in his valuable paper on *A LOVER'S COMPLAINT*, published in the following year, Professor Mackail took a further and important step by challenging, though not aggressively, the Shakespearean authorship of the "Will" Sonnets, a position well fitted to give a new impulse to criticism, though it seems to have been thus far ignored by professional writers and by most editors.

16. The monograph of Mr. Masfield on Shakespeare¹ (1911), like that of Raleigh, set up expectations which are hardly fulfilled. Written with a happy disregard for all critical and documentary study of the canon, it treats as Shakespearean a quantity of matter which is not rationally conceivable as Shakespeare's, and makes the conventional imputation to him of expressing his own ruling states of mind in themes which he found given to him in pre-existing plays and merely rewrote or adapted for his company.² On the other hand, Mr. Masfield's sense of style, where it is not hypnotised by the canon, enables him to see that *ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM* "bears no single trace of Shakespeare's mind," despite Swinburne's declamation to the contrary; that *EDWARD III* is "by at least two unknown hands, of which Shakespeare's was probably not one"; and that his hand is "plainly marked upon" *THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN*; though here there appears to be no definite perception of what are the Shakespearean parts.

But when we come to the Sonnets and Poems, there is little play of the poet's critical instinct. Wisely declining to meddle with the matters of standing debate, he does not attempt to discriminate between

¹ Home University Library.

² Thus *Lear* is declared to be "an excessive image of all that was most constant in Shakespeare's mind" (p. 190).

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genuine and ungenuine matter, not even raising the question whether the Sonnets are all from one hand. There is a good comment on the Butler theory: "Men with imagination enjoy sweeter and closer friendship than the many know. The many, mulish as ever, therefore imagine evil"; to which, however, it might be replied that not the many but the few have so spoken. But there is no attempt to estimate the psychic or even the literary significance of the Sonnets in any detail. Having regard, then, to the similar abstention of Swinburne from any effort of analysis in this connection, it would appear that we cannot look to the poets, as such, for any special help with our problem or problems. But it would be idle to blame the poets for not yielding us a science of poetics. "'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus"; and we must face our problems for ourselves.

17. A new interest was provided for students of the Sonnets by Mr. Arthur Acheson's volume, 'Mistress Davenant, The Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets, Demonstrating the identity of the Dark Lady of the Sonnets and the authorship and satirical intention of *Willobie his Avis*. With a reprint of *Willobie his Avis* (in part), *Penelope's Complaint*, *An Elegie*, *Constant Susanna*, *Queen Dido*, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, *The Shepherd's Slumber*, and sundry other poems by the same author' (1913. London: Quaritch). Mr. Acheson had in 1903 usefully mooted some important questions (to be discussed hereinafter) in his 'Shakespeare and the Rival Poet'; and the volume of 1913 rendered a fuller service by demonstrating that the author of WILLOBIE HIS AVISA was Matthew Roydon, the friend to whom Chapman dedicated his SHADOW OF THE NIGHT. The collation of the former poem with the others now printed (of which the PENELOPE had been signed Peter Colse)

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sufficiently proved, by the marked evidence of style, the primary thesis, whether or not every poem in the collection be reckoned as certainly from Roydon's hand.

In his 'Life of William Shakespeare' (p. 163, *note*) Professor J. Quincy Adams, without naming Mr. Acheson, dismisses the Roydon theory with the remark that "there is *no* ground for foisting this amateurish production on the famous poet Matthew Roydon. Its avowed author, Henry Willoughby, was an Oxford student. . . ." Mr. Adams tends to be unduly summary. Roydon's "fame" was a small matter of clique-talk; his one known poem, the ELEGIE, is just "an amateurish production," with one good (and alien ?) stanza and the rest descending from poverty to doggerel. Henry Willoughby is not the avowed but merely the alleged author of WILLOBIE. The ground for assigning it to Roydon is its remarkable kinship in form, matter, style, diction, phrase, and idea, with his ELEGIE. Mr. Adams simply ignores evidence when it is against him. Many of Mr. Acheson's theories are untenable; but his thesis as to Roydon's authorship of WILLOBIE is uncommonly well made out.

The further task of identifying the Dark Lady as Mrs. Davenant, though countenanced by the familiar story about her son, Sir William D'Avenant, is more difficult. Mr. Acheson has returned to it in his later work, 'Shakespeare's Sonnet-Story, 1592-1598, Restoring the Sonnets written to the Earl of Southampton in their original *books* and correlating them with personal phases of the Plays of the Sonnet period; with documentary evidence identifying Mistress Davenant as the Dark Lady'—a truly imposing monument of devoted research.¹ The evidence for the identification of the Dark Lady with Anne Bird (= Avis = the Avis of Roydon's poem) is now enormously compli-

¹ London : Quaritch, 1922.

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cated;¹ yet so far persuasive that, though it is quite impossible to trace the thread clearly to the end, a reader is at least disposed to say that Mr. Acheson has made out as good a case as did Tyler for Mistress Fitton.

The great difficulty is that, as Dowden pointed out, the Avisia of the poem is presented as chaste repelling both of her suitors, H. W. and W. S., and that Mr. Acheson is forced to surmise a subsequent relapse on Avisia's part, involving her coming to London and playing there the rôle of the Dark Lady in the Sonnets. As there is no proof whatever for this, we are left just as much in doubt as ever. Tyler's strongest argument, drawn from the name implications in a very equivocal Sonnet, No. 151, was one which he could say very little about; and Mr. Acheson's identification of the subject with Mistress Davenant, oddly enough, opens up the same argument ("*avenant*" having possibly the implications assigned by Tyler to "Fitton"). It is thus impossible to draw a clear inference in either case. The Dark Lady remains a dark enigma after all Mr. Acheson's unparalleled research; and the professional critics, naturally, leave the matter alone.

18. A valuable contribution to the study of the Sonnets in every aspect was made in 1916 by the publication of the American Professor Raymond M. Alden's 'Variorum' edition²—a massive compilation made in the manner and spirit of the great Furness Variorum edition of the plays, which it resembles in outward aspect. Here at length we have an indication of all, or nearly all,³ the theories of the Sonnets, as well as

¹ The queerest item is that the father of Anne Bird is declared to have had two families, one legitimate, the other illegitimate, in which two sets of daughters have the same names.

² Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York.

³ Professor Alden, like his English professional confrères, overlooks Fleay's origination of the Hervey theory.

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a copious and competent 'variorum' annotation of each, up to the centenary year. Here the student can read everything that has been said about "begetter," and the substance of all the static as well as the visionary or speculative writing on the Sonnets. Professor Alden is himself judiciously static, plumping for no theory and making no account of any of the suggestions as to non-authenticity. For the purposes of a 'Variorum,' indeed, that is as it should be.

19. An important advance in that regard, however, was made in the admirably annotated edition of the Sonnets added in 1918 by Mr. C. Knox Pooler to the 'Arden' edition of Shakespeare, which includes a very comprehensive and judicious Introduction. Mr. Pooler avows "without shame or regret" that he has "nothing to add to the many and various answers to the questions: Who was 'Mr. W. H.'? Was he the friend of Shakespeare or of his adventurous publisher? If Shakespeare's friend, was he also his patron, and if his patron, was he the 3rd Earl of Southampton, or the 3rd Earl of Pembroke? Was the Dark Lady Mistress (*i.e.*, Miss) Fitton, or Mistress (*i.e.*, Mrs.) Davenant, the innkeeper's wife, or Penelope, Lady Rich, or Queen Elizabeth, dark only in her deeds, or none of these?" And so with the six theories of the rival poet. The Southampton and the Herbert theories are reviewed and left as unproved, with a rather stronger emphasis against Pembroke than against Southampton; and the Hervey theory (assigned to Mrs. Stopes without mention of Fleay) is indicated without comment.

But Mr. Pooler for his own part, though in his Introduction (p. xxxiv) he puts matters more conservatively, takes up in his notes critical positions of some importance, noting that the authenticity of Sonnet 143 has been questioned; expressing his own opinion that 145, 153, and 154 are probably not by Shakespeare, and that 128 is "un-Shakespearean in sound and

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rhythm "; and indicating, as follows, a similar doubt as to No. 20.

"This sonnet, if Shakespeare's, sounds as if he had been furnished with a set of rimes and challenged to bombast them out into a poem. *It is not pleasing in rhythm*, and it differs from all other sonnets in having *no single rimes*, and from its companions here in containing neither a promise of immortality nor a declaration of love for his friend. Moreover, it is hardly credible that it should be addressed to the same person as xxvi, if xxvi is indeed an envoy to the first group."

This is, I think, the first important application to the Sonnets problem, by an important editor, of a critical test in terms of style, diction, and metrics as apart from unspecialised objections, and reasons given for rejecting 143, 153, and 154; and it is much to be hoped that the lead will be followed; though Mr. Pooler has *also* stated that he thinks all the Sonnets "(except *perhaps* 127,¹ 145, 153, and 154) were written by Shakespeare and in his own person." The particular impeachment of Sonnet 20 involves not only a new challenge to all "Hughes" theories and to the Butler theory in special, but a question as to the genuineness of other Sonnets in a similar taste, not so markedly suggestive of an alien hand. Sonnet 63, for instance, is distinctly poor in diction, if not quite as poor as Sonnet 20; and 61 and 62, to which it points back, are hardly better. And if 67, which belongs to the same inferior order of execution, appears to connect with 68, of which the first line is better, the second line of that again sinks, and relative poverty reigns through the remainder, and through 69 and 70, till we find a recovery in 71. On such problems and others, one could have wished some comment from Mr. Pooler.

On Sonnet 127, partly impeached (apparently by a slip of the pen) in his own Introduction, he quotes the

¹ Mr. Pooler must have meant, I think, to write 128, which he expressly challenges in his notes on it.

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opinion of Professor Mackail that not only are 153 and 154 "pretty certainly not by Shakespeare," but 128 and 145 are "very doubtful," while "a plausible case can be made out against 135, 136, and 143." Seeing that this last challenge, if borne out, would cut away at a stroke the whole case for the "Will" theory, beloved of Furnivall and the Pembroke party, it is much to be desired that it should be put to the touch. Mr. Pooler leaves it undiscussed, though it is implicitly rejected in his Introduction. The fact that Professor Mackail reckons the 1-126 series "a continuous, ordered, and authentic collection," should rather arrest attention for his doubts than impair their appeal for those who may carry their doubts further.

20. The 'Arden' edition thus left the situation still chaotic, though in a measure newly clarified, and, despite the editor's disclaimer, stirred by newly justified suspicion of the canonical authority of Thorpe's collection. Discerning readers could not fail to see the justice of Mr. Pooler's editorial doubts; and such as were not content to leave his tests without further application must have been moved to further steps in scepticism. It was upon such a situation that Mr. H. T. S. Forrest, of the Indian Civil Service, supervened in 1923 with a large but lively quarto,¹ making an energetic claim to demonstrate that most of the Sonnets are visibly not Shakespeare's at all, though many of those denied him are pronounced "fine"; that the sameness of theme in a large number proves them to have been products of sonneteering competitions,² set up by a patron, identified as Southampton; that many of the Sonnets contain parodying references to others, which can be explained only by

¹ *The Five Authors of 'Shakespeare's Sonnets,'* (Chapman and Dodd).

² This recalls Simpson's notion of an "academe" of sonnet-making; but Mr. Forrest's theory is independently formed.

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the competition theory; that five different hands are to be detected; and that the newly discovered four can be more or less confidently identified as Barnabe Barnes, William Warner, John Donne, and Samuel Daniel.

It is no good argument against such a thesis that it has thus far not only made few if any converts but aroused little discussion. Any markedly innovating theory which proffered no piquant and documented sensation, such as Tyler's account of the Dark Lady, would meet with such disregard, however plausibly supported, if it involved a large elimination of matter generally regarded as unquestionably Shakespearean. And there is always something deterrent about a large quarto. But it must be confessed that Mr. Forrest's demonstration of his thesis is acutely disconcerting even to readers who would readily grant him his ground-hypothesis for the argument's sake.

It is indeed surprising that, after the various sallies of Massey, Mackay, Shindler, Yeatman, and Eichhoff, no other critic had in nearly twenty years systematically raised the question of the genuineness of the mass of the Sonnets. The frequent dismissal of a few might be supposed to force inevitably the question of the possibility of the presence of other alien matter in a collection so ill certificated as wholly Shakespearean. But it has not been so. Mr. Walsh, who stringently impugns alike the honesty and the competence of Thorpe, puts no such question; and his inclusion of the non-Shakespearean ROMEO AND JULIET prologues, the HENRY V epilogue, Helena's archaic sonnet-letter in ALL'S WELL, the "If love make me forsworn" and other spurious items from THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM, with such dubious Sonnets as 153, 154, indicate him as leaving questions of authenticity in general outside his editorial plan, though he rejects No. 145. Yet the undisputed fact that most of the pieces in THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM are non-Shakespearean would

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appear to dictate close scrutiny. Thorpe's Quarto, it would seem, has acquired the canonical status of the Folio, as regards alike the SONNETS and A LOVER'S COMPLAINT, even for those who regard him as a quite unscrupulous person. Mr. Forrest was thus entitled to a ready and careful hearing.¹ The trouble is that the plausibility of his case is found to be limited to the hypothesis upon which it proceeds.

His real service to the investigation lies in his bold and indeed extravagant primary denial that the great mass of the Sonnets *can* be of Shakespeare's writing. Such a challenge should at least disturb the habit of reading as necessarily Shakespeare's every sonnet ascribed to him by a piratical publisher, and should put every student on the alert. I am in agreement with much of what he says of the poor quality of the inferior Sonnets; though I find the phrase "variegated vile-ness," applied by him (p. 226) to his samples from Sonnets 22, 28, 38, 46, 51, 56, 67, 81, 97, 100, 103, unduly vivacious. But when the iconoclastic challenger in effect avows that he sees no imperfections in the VENUS AND ADONIS ("that lovely poem"), and proceeds to find Sonnets 4, 5,² and 6 worthy only of "the Lawyer" (*i.e.*, Warner, who has left *no* signed sonnet, and no verse that is not archaically ungainly) and 7, 8, and 9 worthy only of "the Minor Poet" (*i.e.*, Barnabe Barnes, who has but one reasonably good sonnet in his signed hundred odd); and that 13, 15, 16, 17 are assignable to (of all men) John Donne,

¹ It is to be feared, however, that his account of the present writer as "an eminent and *strictly orthodox* Shakespearean, Sir J. M. Robertson," has evoked some little glee in Gath. Mr. Forrest has perhaps latterly discovered how ill he has bestowed his generous certificate.

² This is certainly a feebly inspired performance, and ten years ago its genuineness was challenged by the present writer. But if we are to pass the entire VENUS as beautiful, it is hardly to be disallowed, even on the score of its absurdity; and to assign it to Warner gives no help to criticism. A lawyer is surely the last person to be credited with it.

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"the Humorist," we are driven to ask for (1) the concrete grounds on which the negative decisions are given, and (2) tangible and testable grounds for the assignments. Such grounds are neither recognisably given nor imaginable.

Mr. Forrest describes thus the literary characteristics by which he identifies his five competitors:

SHAKESPEARE: (1) Clear Thinking, (2) Clear Writing, (3) Perfect Versification, (4) Accurate Simile and Metaphor, (5) Balance and Restraint, (6) Self-respect. Keynote: MASTERY.

THE MINOR POET (*i.e.*, Barnes): (1) Confused Thinking, (2) Slovenly Phrasing, (3) Smooth Versification, (4) Sound, not Sense, (5) Forcing the Note, (6) The Flunkey. Keynote: SLOPPINESS.

THE LAWYER (*i.e.*, Warner): (1) Pedestrian Style, (2) The Attorney, (3) The Accountant, (4) Clumsy Humour, (5) The Candid Friend, (6) The Old Dog. Keynote: MATTER-OF-FACTNESS.

THE HUMORIST (*i.e.*, Donne): (1) Compressed Thought, (2) Super-Concettism, (3) Deliberate Dissonance, (4) Subtle Humour, (5) Personal Allusion, (6) The Polite Shirker. Keynote: BURLESQUE.

THE NEWCOMER (*i.e.*, Daniel): (1) Correct Versification, (2) Shallowness. Keynote: CONVENTIONALITY.

There is here, certainly, a careful and sustained attempt at literary or at least character analysis; but a simple collation of the sets of qualities makes it fairly clear that the differentiation of the hands was made on other grounds before the qualities were thus expiscated. The Minor Poet and the Newcomer are credited respectively with "smooth versification" and "correct versification." What is the difference? Versification is the most concrete of the criteria indicated; yet it slips thus through our fingers. And how exactly are we to distinguish between shallowness and conventionality on the one hand and "sound not sense" on the other? Doubtless shades of difference are indicated; but how is authorship to be ascertained by such ill-defined clues and gradations? And how is

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shallowness in the Sonnets to be discriminated from thinness in the VENUS ?

The first demand by a student interested in comparing styles will be for a parallelism of form or matter, thought or sentiment, rhythm or manner or structure. Barnes, with his large output of signed work, offers a broad field for such comparative scrutiny. For one thing, he abounds in "legal" phraseology, and so might fitly take the part of the Lawyer. But in the chapter on "The Identification of the Rival Poets," in which he gives us samples from Sidney (3), Drayton (6), Spenser (2), Daniel (6), Constable (3), Griffin (1), and Peele (1, a truncated poem), which are nothing to this purpose, Mr. Forrest gives only two from Barnes, to whom he assigns twenty-nine of the Sonnets in Thorpe's Quarto; and those two signed Sonnets present positively no resemblance to any save two of those now assigned. They are markedly more conventional, more primitive, more archaic, more reminiscent of a previous age, and of Watson, than almost anything in Thorpe. And yet Mr. Forrest gives him Sonnets 36-38, 48, 54, 57, 60, and 71 !

The one quite plausible assignment to Barnes, apart from that of No. 20, discussed below, is that of No. 99, which alone in the Quarto has fifteen lines—a frequent thing in PARTHENOPHIL AND PARTHENOPHE. No. 99 is certainly a poor production, abounding in cheap diction, such as "thy sweet that smells," and the conceit in which it is embodied; "which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells"; "too grossly dyed"; the repetition "annexed thy breath," and the feeble "eat him up to death." Many, probably, will agree with Mr. Forrest that Shakespeare never wrote such feeble stuff, and some perhaps may be contrite for ever having supposed that he did. It may very well be Barnes's work. But the man who wrote that could not have written 60 and 71, or even 54 and 57; and 36

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and 48 are equally beyond him. And though 98 is partly on the same theme as that of 99, and therefore should be regarded, on the "competition" theory, as from another hand, Mr. Forrest assigns that *also* to Barnes. It is really of much better quality than the other. On the other hand, as we shall see in a later chapter, Mr. Forrest has unhappily assigned to Shakespeare a notably poor Sonnet, 79, which may quite well have been written by Barnes, while assigning to Barnes the much better Sonnet which follows.

One of the specialties of Barnes is his indulgence in two-syllable rhymes; but only one of the two sonnets selected from him has one such rhyme. Seeing that each of a bunch of three Quarto Sonnets assigned to him by Mr. Forrest (115, 118, 119, all quite above his level) actually has dissyllable rhymes, the theorist might have made his case seem stronger by sampling such rhymes from Barnes's signed work. He does indeed—this time with real plausibility—assign to him No. 20, which has nothing but dissyllable rhymes, and which, as we shall see later, does at several points suggest Barnes. But his difficulty would still have been that his cited samples, save in this case and in that of No. 99, would afford no touch of similarity of matter and manner to the Quarto Sonnets; whereas a number of the Sonnets he resigns to Shakespeare employ dissyllable rhymes, including such bad ones as *remember'd* and *tender'd* (120) and *love thee* and *prove me* (26).

As regards Barnes's poetic quality, Mr. Forrest very candidly admits that Dowden's laudatory review of Grosart's edition (1875) is ill borne out by a perusal. "After such a panegyric, to read through the PARTHENOPHIL collection itself is a most disappointing experience. The 'meaningless doggerel' and 'grotesque conceits' mentioned by Sir Sidney Lee are there in abundance, but the beauties discerned by Professor Dowden seem

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to be very few and far between. There is no getting away from the fact that, defective as many of the Minor Poet's sonnets are [in the Forrest classification] their general standard is *far higher* than that of PARTHENOPHIL." And the theorist can but fall back on the sanguine hypotheses that Barnes was "one of those people who do much better with a 'copy' in front of them," and that he "received a great deal of 'outside' assistance, especially in the direction of 'pruning and lopping away' crudities and extravagances." By such pleading, how can so alert a mind as Mr. Forrest's think to persuade anybody? It is true that in the publisher's preface to PARTHENOPHIL AND PARTHENOPHE the poet is declared to think his work poor, and to hope to redeem it "with some more excellent work hereafter"; but that is small guarantee for improvement. Mr. Forrest would have done much better merely to suggest that Sonnet 99, with its fifteen lines and its bad quality, is quite Barnesian, and that Sonnet 20, impeached by Mr. Pooler in respect, among other things, of its having only dissyllable rhymes, is on *that* score, as well as in point of diction, assignable to Barnes, to whom he actually does assign it without any such concrete justification.

In view of the admitted entire dissemblance of Barnes's signed work and the bulk of that now assigned to him by Mr. Forrest, we are driven to the fatal inference that he picked out Barnes, for twenty-nine Sonnets, not from any style clues whatever, but because of the fact that Barnes had dedicated his PARTHENOPHIL to (among others) Southampton, and can thus be conceived as the "thy Poet" of Sonnet 79. If this be so, an assignment which can be justified only by style tests is made without any regard to them. Yet Mr. Forrest claims to make the identification "with absolute certainty" (p. 19). On the other hand, "the Lawyer" is "with practical certainty" identified

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with William Warner, who has left us not a single signed sonnet, or a single sign of interest in new verse forms. Every literary characterisation of Warner cited by Mr. Forrest (p. 210), from Drayton to Saintsbury, is in flat antagonism to the ascription to him of any Sonnet in the Quarto.

Yet Mr. Forrest will have it (p. 211) that Warner "*must* have tried his hand at sonnet-writing—every Englishman with any pretension to 'culture' did so in the last decade of the sixteenth century." Did Marlowe?¹ Is Nashe to be called a sonneteer on the strength of a few prosaic examples? Was Jonson, who cursed Petrarch for inventing sonnets, a sonneteer in virtue of two or three perfunctory and songless specimens? He had no such repute. Why, then, should Warner be supposed to be one? Again we find the reasons for the choice are non-literary. Warner was a lawyer, and so would meet the needs of the hypothesis, which call for knowledge or law and accountancy, age ("the Old Dog") and learning. Sir John Davies has much better claims as poet and lawyer and mocker of sonnets; but youth disqualifies him. Barnes has a score of legalisms in his sonnets; but he too will not fit, being young. As to Warner, finally, Mr. Forrest argues that if we knew Browning only from "How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix" we could not have thought him capable of writing EVELYN HOPE or CALIBAN. One wonders what Warner, *qua* lawyer, would think of an argument which would make eligible as a sonneteer *any* learned and elderly lawyer of the period.

For Donne, naturally, the case is no better. Rather more plausibly might the place of "the Humorist" have been given to Davies, who wrote, cleverly enough, nine "gulling sonnets," besides the ten various sonnets

¹ He *might* have written Sonnet 55; but Mr. Forrest does not suggest that.

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to Philomel,¹ and epigrams in sonnet form. Donne is ostensibly selected because he is a satirist and a grim humorist; but when we ask what resemblances of matter and manner there are between the twenty-five sonnets in his 'Divine Poems' and the thirty assigned to him by Mr. Forrest in the Quarto, we are at a dead stand. If one were to go through the Quarto looking for sonnets which in anyway recall Donne's cast of mind—for that is all we *could* look for—we might say that 44 and 45, and 112, 113, 114, in a way suggest it, inasmuch as in them the crowding thought seems to overpower the melodic impulse, yielding an effect of predication rather than of song. And these five sonnets Mr. Forrest has assigned to Donne. But when we turn to Donne's known sonnets and study their technique, they are found greatly to outgo even those five in staccato and songless quality. In none does the singing voice carry for more than four lines together; in most, much less; in some, we have almost a continuity of jars. Furthermore, only one ('To the Lady Magdalen Herbert') is in the "Shakespeare" form of alternating rhymes; the others are Petrarchan—in structure, verily not in tone or purport.

As for the other twenty-five Quarto Sonnets given to Donne by Mr. Forrest, they are still less to be conceived as of his penning. Not only do we never find in them that disregard of accent for which, Ben Jonson declared, Donne "deserved hanging," they nearly all have the ease of movement and the lyric note which are the mark of the majority of the Quarto Sonnets, good and bad alike, and which in Donne seem to come only by happy accident, as if beauty of line or phrase were never with him a ruling purpose.²

¹ First assigned to Donne by Grosart, but later reclaimed by him for Davies.

² Walton tells that Donne wrote his piscatorial parody of 'Come live with me and be my love,' in order "to show the world that he

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Neither in his strength nor in his weakness does he seem to be present here, for a reader who is free of theoretic presupposition. It is the more difficult to understand how this "humorist" aspect could suggest him as behind many of the Thorpe Sonnets, seeing that he has left us none that is non-religious,¹ and is finally not known to have had any intimate connection with Southampton.

After this, it is hardly necessary to discuss the claim for Daniel as "Newcomer" in the series of competitions among three or four poets which Mr. Forrest's theory posits. In point of fact the specialty of Daniel, in two out of three of his sonnets, is to be stiff-paced, staccato, compilatory, conscientiously laboured, and only with pinching and painstaking correct; whereas most of the Quarto Sonnets assigned to him by the theorist have just the general canorous ease of the majority. If Mr. Forrest had proceeded on a regard to structural resemblances, he might with some little plausibility have assigned to Daniel No. 129 ("The expense of spirit in a waste of shame"), which so many people value as Shakespearean because of its neurotic moralism. But Mr. Forrest puts No. 129 in his bunch of fourteen "Occasional Sonnets" (pp. 174-5), which are assigned to nobody (though "everything points to the Lawyer as the author" of Sonnet 77), on the disarmingly candid avowal that eleven "could not be made to fit in with the Theory," and that the notes on them "have nothing whatever to do with the Theory." They are nevertheless pertinent in themselves to our general inquiry, and will be so considered hereinafter. The

could make soft and smooth verses when he thought smoothness worth his labour" (*Compleat Angler*, Part I, ch. xii, end). And *these* are still but rudely melodious.

¹ The "Songs and Sonnets" are so classified in terms of sixteenth-century usage. They include no Sonnets in the now accepted sense of the term.

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point now to be noted is that the theorist, even while remarking of No. 129 that "its terse sententiousness has nothing in common with the facile flow of [Shakespeare's] verse in the serial Sonnets," leaves it as merely doubtful, finding for it no other paternity.

When a really abnormal Sonnet—abnormal alike in matter and manner—is thus left unassigned, the confident assignments of so many others of normal quality are the more staggering. Evidently Mr. Forrest feels that if he did not produce named poets to fit the general case, his hypothesis of competitions would be left in the air. As his identifications, then, will not bear any examination, in the air the hypothesis remains. It is but fair, indeed, to say that his ascription of Sonnet 121 to the Patron, by way of retort to the Sonnets impeaching his conduct, is in itself suggestive. The vital difficulty is to imagine the Patron instituting a competition to impeach him, or, for that matter, to persuade him to get married. For the rest, Mr. Forrest has chosen to rely on the "procurer" theory concerning "Mr. W. H.," identifying him with Lee's William Hall, and stressing the old datum of "Mr. W. H. All," thus inviting us to contemplate a publisher solemnly (or otherwise) wishing immortality to the tout who procured him a hopeful bundle of copy.

We are thus left with an unsatisfactory solution of the "begetting" of the Sonnets, and, what is more to be regretted, an unsatisfactory attempt to distinguish between Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean matter. We may readily admit the plausibility of the theory that Sonnet 121 is a retort to others of the Sonnets, and as such non-Shakespearean, though it is a pretty strong piece of work; and we may as readily admit not only the relative poverty of No. 5 but the questionable guise of No. 99 and No. 20, on which last Mr. Pooler, as we have seen, and as Mr. Forrest notes, has passed a criticism implying and inciting serious doubts as to

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its authorship. And so with a number of other inferior Sonnets, such as 62, 63, 67-70, which in point of fact are impugned by Mr. Forrest. But when we begin at the beginning, and note how he passes 1, 2, and 3 as faultless, clear in thinking and in writing, accurate in simile and metaphor, and marked by balance and restraint; while 4, 5, and 6 are given to the Lawyer and thus stamped as pedestrian in style, with whatso else of the lawyer's qualities may be discerned in them; and 7, 8, 9 are given to the incompetent Barnabe Barnes, as marked by confused thinking and slovenly phrasing, "sound not sense," and all the rest of it; and 11, with its obscurities and its lack of fluidity, is given to Shakespeare; and 13, 15, 16, and 17 are assigned to Donne, writing "humorous" sonnets with a fluidity and melody never traceable in his own stark verse—why, we must regretfully pronounce that we are getting no light on our problem, but only darkness visible.

For the thinking in the Sonnets called Shakespearean is certainly not always clear; and in those given by Mr. Forrest to the Minor Poet it is not always confused; and those given to the Lawyer are not more pedestrian than No. 3, which might as well be allotted to him, and probably would have been but for lines 9 and 10; and those given to the Humorist are not humorous, still less "burlesque," and are for the most part about as Shakespearean as those left to Shakespeare. In No. 1, the concluding lines are not at all clear, and are not very beautiful; and No. 3 would be immemorable but for the two happy lines; and the writing and thinking in No. 11 are not clear either. Such flaws, in early work, are not of the kind that argues inferior authorship: there are such faults in a hundred places in the *VENUS*, though Mr. Forrest does not seem to be disturbed by them. It is another matter when we come to the striking incongruities of tone and purport in the

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Sonnets which follow No. 17; and there we must follow another order of test.

The one kind of concrete internal clue upon which Mr. Forrest builds is that of echoes or apparent parodies of word and phrase, which, he tells us, gave him his lead to his theory of a series of competitions. But there is no validity in an argument which alternately finds in inferior competitors the solution of parallelisms of theme, phrase, and allusion, and in such parallelisms the ground for a theory of competitions by more or less inferior poets, several of whom cannot seriously be regarded as likely so to compete. One or other thesis must be independently established to make both valid. Barnes in his signed work actually uses rhymes which Mr. Forrest supposes to have been later suggested to him in "competition" sonnets by Shakespeare's; and Shakespeare admittedly reverts to certain words and phrases in his undisputed verse. There is, further, no valid ground left for the assumption that similarities or identities of *theme* point to competition, when such similarities or identities are actually present within the sets of sonnets attributed to each alleged competitor in the opening series, Shakespeare included. How dubious is Mr. Forrest's inference of competitive parody we shall see when we collate the early Sonnets with passages in the early Plays and Poems, or the latter with plays which may or may not be Shakespearean.

There *may* be different hands even in the first seventeen Sonnets; but to prove as much will be difficult; and satisfying proof is not to be reached either by purely subjective preference or by attributions founded on arbitrary assumptions as to the personal identities to be inferred from the tone or substance of given Sonnets. When Mr. Forrest (p. 211) admits many of the alleged non-Shakespearean Sonnets to be "fine," he plunges his whole theory in doubt. What right have

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the Minor Poet or the Lawyer or the burlesquing Humorist, as such, to be "fine"?

On the other hand, there is a certain fineness of quality in the anonymous Sonnet to Florio, picked out by Minto as Shakespearean. It is not really good enough for Shakespeare; but if it had been in Thorpe's Quarto it would certainly have passed in the crowd. Why, then, should not that sonneteer, labelled X, have been called into the competitions, being the friend of Florio, Southampton's protégé?

Finally, Mr. Forrest's classifications shift under his hands, to an extent that he does not appear to realise. After making his first list of genuine Shakespearean Sonnets, numbering eighteen, he found that some which he had rejected as inferior were plainly connected with some of those he had certified, and accordingly, without sign of misgiving over such a deflection in his instinct, he produced (p. 11) a "final" list of twenty Shakespearean Sonnets—1, 2, 3, 18, 26, 29, 33, 34, 64, 66, 73, 74, 78, 79, 102, 106, 132, 143, 144, 146. Yet on page 96 we find Shakespeare further credited with 109, 110, 116, 120; and on page 150 he is further given 88, 89, 90, and on page 156 No. 40; to which, on page 160, are added Nos. 140, 148, 150. Thus the "final" list of twenty is expanded to thirty-one—Mr. Forrest himself (p. 225) says thirty-two or thirty-three—of which four are finally listed in brackets. Evidently there is no abiding virtue in the "acid test" of intuition; and when we turn to the "fine" Sonnets which lie outside the company of the elect, we begin to be conscious of intuitions of our own, which rebel against Mr. Forrest's genial but arbitrary rule.

It is with regret that one thus "marks down" a book written with such verve and amenity and ability as mark Mr. Forrest's work throughout. He is himself a man of literary faculty, with a turn for crisp expression not to be found in any previous theorist. No

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book on the Sonnets is so alertly and attractively handled, so readable through a long and complicated exposition, so free from inflation even in the utterance of over-sanguine expectation of general assent, so vivid and at the same time so candid in the exposition of a theoretic case. The conclusion would seem to be, once more, that the solution of the problems of the Sonnets is not a hopeful quest.

21. And still new solutions present themselves. The latest is that proffered by Sir Denys Bray, also of the Indian Civil Service, in 'The Original Order of Shakespeare's Sonnets,'¹ which in respect of its title and its thesis is almost as bold in its way as the more extensively revolutionary treatise of Mr. Forrest. And this too is an attractive book in respect of its debonair temper, its courteous assurance, its testimony to a genuine literary interest in a literary problem. One takes it up with the same sense of promise. And one lays it down with the same sense of hope deferred—though nothing worse.

Sir Denys, convinced like most of us that the Quarto order in many places cannot be right, has duly scanned the efforts of his predecessors (barring Mr. Acheson, perhaps) to place the Sonnets in natural groups; and it is in such groups that he himself places them. But whereas group-makers in general realise that though Sonnets may form groups, by selection, they are not to be supposed to have been planned or written in such sets, Sir Denys either assumes or concludes that Shakespeare did so plan and produce. But he claims to find his order, for Sonnets and for sets, by a quite objective test—that, namely, of rhyme-links from Sonnet to Sonnet throughout. He has seen Mr. Forrest's undertaking, and politely leaves it alone, observing that his own claim "is at once greater and more humble." It is humble, that is, in that he is

¹ Methuen, 1925.

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not subjective, but keeps his eye on a concrete thread of clues. It is great, in that he puts "not [*nor* in his text] any brilliant arrangement of my own. Simply Shakespeare's." Certainly that is great enough, in the way of sonnet-theories.

But when we have mastered his ostensibly objective and simple mode of proceeding, we are plunged in a perplexity that goes on deepening till we end in absolute negation. We are to proceed by rhyme-links. As Sir Denys says, there are such ostensible links in some Elizabethan sonnet-sequences published by their authors; though as a matter of fact Daniel's links, for example, are not mere rhyme-links but often line-links. Further, as he claims, several pairs of Sonnets in the Quarto, recognised by all as clearly connected in subject, are found to be also marked by rhyme-links; and, what is still more to his purpose, pairs of Sonnets, far apart in the Quarto but independently indicated by Mr. Pooler and others as connected in theme, are also found to possess rhyme-links—as they very well might, being on the same topics. All very true; but at once the trouble begins. Were all those Sonnets *planned* in respect of their rhyme-links? And if so, what about all the rest? Sir Denys himself recognises a "second-edition" procedure by which 'you' Sonnets are intercalated into a first series of 'thou' Sonnets. The notion fascinates for a moment; but when we think of a poet scanning his album and planning a new 'you' Sonnet to hook on by rhyme-links between two 'thou' Sonnets, we are inclined to say of the poet's art—well, something disrespectful. The method is so suggestive of Mr. Donnelly.

Two capital questions at once obtrude themselves on the student. First, are we to believe that the poet deliberately carried on, through a series of years, a series of 154 Sonnets of which each one after the first was consciously connected to its predecessor by a

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rhyme-link, no matter what might be the breaks of time and theme and feeling, and the change of recipient, at any point? Why *should* a poet wilfully do such a thing? What kind of poetic sincerity does it suggest? Secondly, how on earth are we to know which Sonnet came *first*? Neither of these questions seems to have occurred to Sir Denys. Yet he must be aware that he had to choose his opening Sonnet either on a subjective fancy or at sheer haphazard. Either way, what can be the objective value of the result, logically speaking?

The start would seem, and this naturally, to have been subjective. Sir Denys begins with a group of eight, headed "Adoration," which stand numbered in the Quarto 20, 91, 25, 31, 53, 62, 22, 18. Sir Denys, we note, is committed in fact as in theory to the acceptance of every Sonnet in the Quarto as genuinely Shakespeare's. We start with the dubious No. 20; and in due course we find the three "trivial" Sonnets, rejected by so many critics, inevitably coming into a place in the "chain." Yes: but why *start* with No. 20, even on the subjective assumption that "Adoration" naturally precedes "Invitation to Marriage and Escape from Mortality in Fatherhood"? Doubtless group second may be hooked on to group first by a rhyme-link; but so could any other group, at a pinch.

Waiving the initial *saltum mortale*, let us turn to the second group, which begins with Q. 126, and goes on with 65, 15, 16, 13, 11, 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 14, 5, 6, 8, 3, 17, 12, 7. Thus we keep, in a new order, all the invitation Sonnets of the Quarto, with 126 and 65 put in the forefront of the group, though they are *not* invitations to marriage, and the former is not a Sonnet but a set of six couplets, which serves in the Quarto to end "the first series" in the common estimate. But it happens to be connectable with the last of Sir

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Denys's first group, by the rhyme of "grow'st"¹: that is ostensibly its inevitable link mark. At once, however, we note that it has the rhyme *pleasure-treasure*, which occurs in the first Sonnet of the first group. Why, then, does it not link there? Already the bottom has fallen out of the theory (untenable as theory) at the first push of practice. The word *treasure* rhymes with *pleasure* in the Quarto Sonnets 20, 52, 75, 126. If "dogs is dogs," these should follow on in the new chain. But Sir Denys, having somehow started with No. 20, elects to follow on with 91, where *pleasure* rhymes with *measure*, and serenely sprinkles the other three *treasure-pleasure* Sonnets in the order 9, 31, 32. Surely in vain is this net spread in the sight of any bird!

The professed law, thus necessarily broken at the very start (since *no* order can bring in sequence all sets of Sonnets using any one rhyme), is visibly broken everywhere along the line. The instances leap to the eyes. Sir Denys's No. 21 (5 in Q.) begins with the rhyme *frame-same*; and lo! this recurs in his No. 100 (59 Q.). Why were they not "linked" in his series? His 21 has not even a rhyme-word-link with his 20: only the rhyme-sound of *well* and *dwell* ("cats is dogs") gives them their semblance of juncture. And his 21, further, ends a line with *the very same*, which line-ending we find again in his 101 (108 Q.). Why are these not linked? What *are* the rules of this game?

It is all very well to connect, as 90-91, the Q. Sonnets 77 and 122, which everybody sees to relate to the same topic, and which both use the poor rhyme *memory-eternity* as well as the rhyme-word *brain*. But No. 90 has the rhyme-word *waste* in common with No. 116. There are scores of such disregarded links: Sonnets thus ostensibly holding out hooks and eyes to

¹ Not to mention "thee," such slight rhymes being ignored as not strong enough for a theoretic chain.

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each other are placed far asunder. But that is not all. Sir Denys remorselessly breaks up rhyme-linked sequences which he finds in the Quarto.

For instance, Q. 153 and 154 obviously connect, on the link principle, not only by theme but by the rhyme-word *asleep* and the duplicated words *brand*, *bath*, *cure*, and the phrases *fire of Love* and *Love's fire*. Sir Denys, however, tranquilly numbers them 129 and 147, connecting his 129 with his 128 (Q. 128 also) by the rhyme-word *hand* only, and with his 130 (Q. 151) by the rhyme *prove-love*. But that rhyme occurs also in his 19 (Q. 10), in his 47 (Q. 32), in his 113 (Q. 39), and in his 48 (Q. 72). Why are not his 129 and 130 linked with his 47 and 48 and his 19 and 113? When rhyme-link competes thus with rhyme-link, what is the principle of selection? That which determined the choice of No. 1?

Again, we find in the Quarto a rhyme-linked series, 22, 23, 24, in which occur the rhymes *heart-art*, *part-heart*, and (in 24) the double *heart-art*, *art-heart*. In 41 we again have *heart-art*, and in the pair 46-47 we have the double *heart-part*, *part-heart*, and *heart-part*; and yet again the same rhyme in 62 and 139, and *heart-depart* in 109. The first Quarto sequence Sir Denys draconically breaks up, making the three linked Q. Sonnets his 7, 103, and 28. The second he does connect in sequence with 28, making Q. 46, 47 his 29, 30. But Q. 109 and 139 he makes his 108 and 145.

Visibly he often conjoins Sonnets in respect of theme, not of rhyme-links; as when he makes Q. 65 and 15 his 10 and 11 on the poor plea of the mere rhyme-sounds *might* and *night*, each in one Sonnet only. Again, making Q. 81 his 44 (following on Q. 73 and 74), he thrusts in Q. 76 ("Tired with all these") as his 45, before Q. 71 ("No longer mourn"), which becomes his 46. But his 45 connects with his 44

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only by the rhyme-semblances *cry*, *strumpeted*, with *die*, *dead*; whereas his 46 has *dead* at the end of its first line, and ought on the link principle to stand as 45. Constantly the principle is thus played with, leaving us aware that we are played with.

A mathematical person could probably have shown us in advance that this must be so, more or less, in view of the proportion between the numbers of lines and of rhyme-words. But it comes home to us with sufficient force when we note that any number of orders could be made for the Sonnets by a free *selection* of rhyme-links. And seeing that Sir Denys actually does get for us, by playing fast-and-loose with rhyme-links, a series of groups very much like other men's groups—groups framed, that is to say, in respect of their themes—it would seem that he really *must* have been subconsciously subjective most of the time! The necessary conclusion is that, just as by rhyme-links he brings in every Sonnet in the Quarto, good, bad, and indifferent, so he could have brought in by rhyme-links any number of sonnets by other sonneteers of that and any later period, in virtue of the simple facts that a considerable number of words in common use offer themselves to all rhymers with a fatal facility; and that one man's rhymes are apt to be remembered by his readers, as well as by himself. Thus "Shakespeare's Order" turns out to be a pleasing dream, which leaves us still free to believe that he did *not* write 20 and 55 and 145 and 153 and 154, and to doubt whether he wrote 126 and a good many others. As Mr. Forrest leaves Sir Denys placidly unconvinced, so Sir Denys will leave Mr. Forrest wholly undisturbed.

One thing, perhaps, the pleasant study of the "Order" of Sir Denys may serviceably bring home to us—the conventionality, namely, of the matter and manner and technique of a great many of the Sonnets. The echoes of *art* and *heart* and *part*, and *love* and *prove*,

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and *pleasure* and *treasure*, tend to set up a capacity for new doubt as to whether Shakespeare is really unlocking his heart all the time in that large bundle of Sonnets, put in any order we like, even if we acquit him of the mania of hooking each to each in chronological succession by rhyme-links. Sir Denys thinks they are newly delightful when read in his. And still we revert to the mood of the non-theoretic editors who have protested that new orders do not seem on that score to make much difference.

The trouble, in short, lies deeper; and if it is ever to be cleared it will be by no *a priori* key or clue. Thanking our theorists for the really pleasant pastime they have afforded us, and for the amenity of exposition which contrasts so happily with the old strifes of Pembrokiens and Southamptonians, realists and idealists, personalists and impersonalists, who were so apt to take jaundiced views of each other, we must proceed to the necessary business of examining and sifting our data of all kinds, and thereafter to tabulate the inferences they may seem legitimately to yield.

22. The latest and, next to the Variorum, the most imposing edition of the Sonnets, that of Professor T. G. Tucker,¹ leaves us facing our task as before, with the aid of his judicial Introduction. He advocates no theory of "Mr. W. H.," beyond saying that that person "was not improbably William [not Lord] Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke," and that he received "a large proportion" of the Sonnets. The Professor summarily dismisses Mistress Fitton² without accepting Mistress Davenant, and has nothing to say of the five-hands theory of Mr. Forrest, which probably had not reached him when he sent his book

¹ Cambridge University Press, 1924.

² For the odd reason that the Dark Lady of the Sonnets was evidently a "promiscuous" kind of person. But that is just what Mary Fitton seems to have been.

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to press; but he is critically progressive to the extent of recognising that the Sonnets of Part I are not all addressed to one recipient; and that "one or two [not specified] are *doubtless* not by Shakespeare at all," while in the second section "a few should almost certainly be rejected." Thus, though the process of discrimination has only been initiated, and is still hesitant, two important editors have within a decade surrendered the tradition of the homogeneity of the Quarto.

It may here be noted, further, that though Professor Tucker's book was published before Sir Denys Bray's, one of his negative conclusions holds good as to that and the other treatises to which it applies. "All attempts," he writes, "to discriminate between the Sonnets addressed with 'thou' and those addressed with 'you' have proved abortive. No difference can be discovered as to greater or less intimacy, greater or less respect, greater or less passion." This holds good despite the unsound addendum that Sonnets 88 and 89 are in connection. Sir Denys, we have seen, adds to his order a new theory of the 'thou' and 'you' Sonnets, by treating the latter as in all cases addenda, by way of 'second edition,' to the previously written 'thou' sonnets. This, of course, like the theory of 'rhyme-links' to which it is conjoined, assumes that Shakespeare wrote all the Sonnets. But the mere fact that a secondary series *can* be fitted, by Sir Denys's method, into a primary rhyme-linked series, is one of the many proofs that the rhyme-link theorem can be manipulated to any extent.

The fact is, as Professor Tucker affirms, that no elucidatory inference whatever can be drawn from the uses of 'thou' and 'you.' The same phenomena are to be seen in the sonnets of Drayton and others. The only reasonable inference is that usage in regard to 'thou' and 'you' was then in a state of transition,

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the outcome of which was that a century later 'thou' had so commonly a disrespectful force that it was seriously argued that its use in the Authorised Version of the Bible should be drastically revised. On the other hand, there is always a possibility that what appears as a 'you' in print may actually have been written 'thou,' the old sign for *th* being often misread for *y*. The fact, however, that 'you' Sonnets multiply after the hundredth, with a matured style, does seem to suggest that the 'thou' Sonnets of Part II were among the earlier.

23. A new and notable step in critical investigation is taken in the pamphlet of Mr. J. A. Fort on 'The Two Dated Sonnets of Shakespeare' (1924: Oxford Univ. Press). The two Sonnets in question are 104 and 107; and the specification in the former of a lapse of three years from April is held to give the date of the first meeting of poet and patron. But the first year date is only inferable; and Mr. Fort puts it as April, 1593, because in that month the VENUS was entered on the Stationers' register. Professor Dover Wilson, favourably reviewing the pamphlet,¹ thinks the dating probably sound; but points out that, on Mr. Fort's own view that 104 suggests an anniversary, the likeliest one is a birthday, which would suit the Pembroke theory, Pembroke having been born in April, 1580, while the birthday of Southampton, whom Mr. Fort takes to be the recipient, was in October. Mr. Fort would probably reply that the anniversary might be simply that of the first meeting.

But there are further issues. We shall find reason for surmising that the early Sonnets were penned before the VENUS; and though that might happen without the poet and the patron meeting, the presumption is otherwise; and as the motive for the matrimonial Sonnets seems to have operated at least as early as

¹ *Review of English Studies*, July, 1925, p. 353.

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1591, *that* may have been the time of first meeting, in which case Sonnet 104 (if genuine) may belong to 1594. Mr. H. T. S. Forrest, it may be noted, assigns 102 to Shakespeare, but allots 104 to the Minor Poet. It is certainly the poorer of the two; and the last line is not made intelligible by Professor Tucker's gallant attempt at interpretation—a thing not ventured on by Craig or Mr. Pooler. But if we agree to rank 102 as genuine, we get practically the same chronological situation, though the number of elapsed years is not specified.

Then arises the problem of the date of 107, which Professor Wilson inclines, with most critics, to place in 1603. Mr. Fort, unable to face the interval of seven years which that dating would place between 104 and 107 on his own theory, makes 107 refer to the release of Southampton from prison in 1598; and Professor Wilson reasonably argues that if there is to be a gap of two and a half years there may as well be one of seven. To which we may now add that there may as well be one of nine! The problem, it will be seen, is sufficiently difficult; and when Professor Wilson points out that 107 might as fitly be connected with Pembroke's release from the Fleet in 1601 as with Southampton's release in 1597, it becomes baffling. We thus get in advance a warning to remember the possibilities: (1) that there may be chronological gaps in the series of Sonnets; (2) that there may have been different recipients for what appear to be "patron" sonnets; and (3) that there may be different poets involved. *from 104*

24. To the rapidly accumulating mass of recent inquiry has been added, in 1925, the posthumous work of Dr. Rudolf Fischer, Professor of English in the University of Innsbruck, on 'Shakespeare's Sonnette.'¹ Some of its positions will find ready

¹ Braumüller, Wien und Leipzig.

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assent, as, that the text was not derived from a collection in the hands of Southampton, and that the order in the Quarto is not chronological. The latter conclusion must long since have been come to by many students, in despite of Dowden and Wyndham. But it is unnecessary to assume, on the other hand, with Professor Fischer, that Thorpe made his collection from a variety of sources, and that he or another arranged it to his own mind. There is, we shall find, a more probable hypothesis.

More important is Professor Fischer's contention that a number of the Sonnets in Part I are addressed, not to the patron or to any other male, but to a woman. This thesis, we have seen, is nearly a century old. Put by Mrs. Jameson, it suggested to Massey his elaborate schema; and it was incidentally supported by Chasles and Taine without any "dramatic" hypothesis, and later by M. J. Wolff. Dr. Fischer carries the proposition so far as to find over twenty of the Sonnets in the first series addressed to a woman. That position, we shall see, is broadly sound; but it is sadly compromised by taking as a "female" Sonnet No. 33. And, though Dr. Fischer has made a useful push towards a fresh critical study of the Sonnets, it is inadequate inasmuch as he takes for granted the Shakespearean authorship of the whole mass—an attitude which we shall find to be untenable.

25. One of the latest of Shakespeare Handbooks, 'A Preface to Shakespeare,' by Mr. G. H. Cowling,¹ puts a view of the Sonnets which is significantly bi-frontal. "Whether the seeming story is true or not," writes Mr. Cowling (p. 78), "Shakespeare unlocks his heart. No portion of his works is so self-revealing." On the opposite page he decides that "whereas some foundation in personal experience can be found for the sonnets of Sidney and Spenser, none can be found,

¹ Methuen, 1925.

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but only invented, for Shakespeare's. It seems most probable, after weighing both sides of the argument, that Shakespeare's Sonnets are a feigned expression of personal feeling, and not autobiography"—a verdict which is hardly strengthened by the addition: "as for example in modern times in Mr. Housman's chain of lyrics entitled 'A Shropshire Lad.'" The two things are hardly comparable.

Thus, after a century of discussion, we find standing the view of the Sonnets put by the younger James Boswell in 1821. That and a multitude of conflicting views have been endlessly debated; and it is still put without any effort to test out the others. If we are to reach anything more widely convincing, it must be by a new examination and induction.

PART II
THE DATA SIFTED

PART II.—THE DATA SIFTED

CHAPTER I

AN EVADED PROBLEM: "A LOVER'S COMPLAINT"

IT is of interest, after having thus noted in outline the course of critical and emotional reaction over the problems of the Sonnets, to realise how uniformly writers of all schools have ignored the bearing of the fact that Thorpe at the end of his volume printed A LOVER'S COMPLAINT, of which he says nothing in his title-page or in his dedication, but which in its place he heads as "By William Shake-speare." It may be said with some confidence that in the absence of such a contemporary attribution nobody would ever have believed in Shakespeare's authorship of the COMPLAINT; but the canonical spell, thus imposed, has ensured for it a mostly silent acceptance. And the very strong critical case against that acceptance is fitly to be considered in connection with the whole question of Thorpe's trustworthiness. It is time that readers should shake themselves free from the spell of usage to which nearly all the editors have resignedly or otherwise succumbed.

And this they may find themselves enabled to do by merely noting the fatal alternation (when it occurs to anybody to think of the matter at all) of the two current internecine views on the subject—that the COMPLAINT is obviously a very youthful work of Shakespeare's; and that it is visibly a late work of his. Malone had no misgivings:

This beautiful poem . . . I wonder that it has not attracted the attention of some English painter, the opening being uncommonly picturesque. The figures, however, of the lady and the old man should be standing, not sitting, by the river side; Shakespeare sitting on a hill.

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To this piping, nevertheless, the painters did not dance.

In this beautiful poem, [says Malone again, at the close], in every part of which the hand of Shakespeare is visible, he perhaps meant to break a lance with Spenser. It appears to me to have more of the simplicity [sic!] and pathetick tenderness of the elder poet, in his smaller pieces, than any other poem of the time. . . .

Still Hallam and Coleridge remained suggestively silent; as did Charles Knight; though he, who tranquilly alleged that Sonnet 128 "has never been exceeded in airy elegance even by the professed writers of amatory poems," need have had little difficulty in panegyrising the COMPLAINT. Dyce appears to begin the series of rash commitments as to the style and date:

A poem of considerable beauty, and *evidently* written by our author in his *earlier* days.

Gervinus dismisses the COMPLAINT with the label of a "supplementary poem"; Ulrici equally abstains from chronology; but Elze finds that the poem is "in form and substance allied to" the VENUS and the LUCRECE; further venturing on the memorable suggestion that *both* the VENUS and the COMPLAINT may have originated in "scenes between him [Shakespeare] and Anne."¹ Furnivall, like most editors, ignored the subject. In the 'seventies it was reported that Swinburne "declared the poem spurious";² but Swinburne did not so avow in his 'Study of Shakespeare'; though he declared that the poem *must* be, for Shakespeare, far later than the VENUS and the LUCRECE. Lee, on the other hand, established the deadly dilemma by adopting Ward's view that if the poem be Shakespeare's "it *must* have been written in very early days."³

¹ *William Shakespeare*, pp. 77, 329.

² Miss Jane Lee in *N.S.S. Transactions*, 1875-6, Part II, p. 267.

³ *Life of Shakespeare*, ed. 1898, p. 91. In the 1925 edition this disappears, and Shakespeare's authorship is questioned.

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The question of authenticity now came to the front. Ward was "not aware" that it had "ever been seriously disputed." Mr. F. S. Boas pointed to the undeniable fact that the poem "was printed at the end of the Sonnets in 1609," and propounded the corollary that "there is *thus* no reason for doubting its authorship."¹ Mr. Masefield was satisfied to affirm oracularly, in 1911, that "It is a work of Shakespeare's youth, fresh and felicitous as youth's work often is, and very nearly as empty." Mr. Masefield must have felt that he was saying something; but fresh and felicitous emptiness remains an elusive conception; and the question of the style, thus disposed of by him, continued to develop doubts.

The masterly analysis of the poem (1912) by Professor Mackail² convinced many that it is "either a work of [Shakespeare's] later and matured period, or not a work of his at all"; the latter being the only conclusion really left acceptable by the Professor's examination. Lee was convinced to the point of pronouncing the poem probably non-Shakespearean; and nothing save academic fencing has been forthcoming to the contrary. The view of it as belonging to the period of the *VENUS* and *LUCRECE* (adopted in Miss Porter's valuable Folio reprint edition of 1906) is a mere refusal to face the style phenomena; and the notion that Shakespeare learned to write in that fashion between 1594 and 1609 is just as incogitable. There are *no* marks in it of the hand of Shakespeare at all, any more than in the main part of *THE PHOENIX* AND *THE TURTLE*; and Butler's dogmatic assertion that the "internal evidence of style . . . admits of no doubt" of Shakespeare's authorship may fitly be regarded as an instance of his avowed practice³ of

¹ *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*, 1896, p. 163.

² Vol. III of the 'Essays and Studies' of the English Association.

³ See *The Note Books of Samuel Butler*, p. 165.

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clinching a dispute by an assertion not founded on knowledge.

The latest examination of the COMPLAINT problem is made by Professor J. Quincy Adams in his 'Life of William Shakespeare' (1923). Rejecting as "fanciful and unlikely" the ascription of the poem to Chapman, without examining any of the grounds given for it, Professor Adams yet admits that the evidence put forward by Professor Mackail for a non-Shakespearean authorship "seems to carry weight," while making the most of the over-generous admission that "there are more than a few passages in the poem which are like Shakespeare at his best." Professor Adams for his own part makes no examination of the style beyond the general verdict that the COMPLAINT "is more far-fetched in its conceits and more laboured in its imagery and style than any work positively known to be from Shakespeare's hand"; and he makes no attempt to date it.

"As to questioning the accuracy of Thorpe's attribution," nevertheless, he admits that "we need have little hesitancy"; which is an important avowal from an academic quarter. "Our chief difficulty," he goes on, "in rejecting Thorpe's ascription lies in the fact that it is hard to discover anyone besides Shakespeare to whom we may assign the poem, which despite its many absurd faults has at times a beauty that reflects the art of the great master." Still, we get no test-samples; and, as aforesaid, Professor Adams will not face the many instances of Chapman's style, thought, phrase, vocabulary, imagery, diction and syntax—the last not the least significant kind of evidence. We seem driven to infer that Professor Adams cannot find in all the poetry of Chapman, dramatic, idyllic, or elegiac, or, for that matter, in all the contemporary poets, any lines nearly as good as

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those singled out by Professor Mackail, of which the most familiar are:

O, father ! what a hell of witchcraft lies
In the small orb of one particular tear.

As against such a liminary view of Elizabethan poets and poetry it might suffice, without going further afield, to refer the reader to Swinburne's estimate of Chapman, with his selections, and, further, to suggest a perusal of OVID's BANQUET OF SENSE, which, there is reason to think, was penned by Chapman partly with the idea of showing how much more expertly and freshly he could handle an amatory theme than Shakespeare had done.¹ There are, to say the least, hundreds of lines in Chapman's signed work which would have securely passed as Shakespeare's had they been found in the Folio or in the Poems or Sonnets. A dozen samples may reasonably suffice to prove that Chapman had afflatus enough for any line in the COMPLAINT:

As two clear tapers mix in one their light,
So did the lily and the hand their white.

Hero and Leander, Poems, p. 84.

Where mortal dangers more than leaves did grow,
In which we could not one free step bestow
For treading on some murder'd passenger
Who thither was by witchcraft forced to err.

Tears of Peace, Poems, p. 126.

Remember thine own verse—Should Heaven turn Hell
For deeds well done, I would do ever well.

Id., p. 112.

This beauty hath a fire upon her brow
That dims the sun of base desires in you.

Hymns in Cynthia, p. 16.

¹ See *Shakespeare and Chapman*, pp. 99-102.

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That now the vaporous object of the eye
Out-pierced the intellect in faculty.

Id., p. 14.

Since Night brings terrors to our frailties still,
And shameless Day doth marble us in ill.

Hymnus in Noctem, p. 8.

No pen can anything eternal write
That is not steeped in humour of the Night.

Id., p. 8.

And as the cloudy bosom of the tree
Whose branches will not let the summer see
His solemn shadows. . . .

Hymnus in Cynthia, p. 16.

And now she us'd the fount where Niobe,
Tomb'd in herself, pour'd her lost soul in tears.

Ovid's Banquet, p. 23.

For sacred beauty is the fruit of sight,
The courtesy that speaks before the tongue,
The feast of souls, the glory of the light,
Envy of age, and everlasting young. . . .

Id., p. 29.

All rhetoric's flowers in less than in a word.

Id., p. 29.

Thus, as the innocence of one betray'd
Carries an Argus with it, though unknown.

Id., p. 31.

While she in passing did her feet dispose
As she had wholly been a moving rose.

Musæus, p. 96.

And all this while the red sea of her blood
Ebb'd with Leander.

Hero and Leander, p. 75

The fact is that the best lines in the COMPLAINT are but instances of that intensive process by which rhetoric, kindling with movement, attains to a degree

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of poetry sufficient to yield a poetic vibration ; and this Chapman achieves a hundred times. Any one of these extracts, found in Shakespeare, would secure confident acclamation from nearly all readers. But that is only one facet of the problem. The main issues, for a scrupulous critic, are (1) the mass of *unpleasing*, baroque, stilted and distorted and charmless diction which puts the poem in another artistic world than Shakespeare's; and (2) the inefficiency of the piece *as a whole*. And these aspects are so characteristic of Chapman that, while it is impossible to assert that no obscure poet of his day *could* have written the COMPLAINT, we have in them reasonable grounds for inferring that he did write it. The total or ultimate unsuccess of the piece as an artistic effort, from either a popular or a critical standpoint, is exactly comparable to the ultimate nugatoriness of the SHADOW OF NIGHT, OVID'S BANQUET, PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA, and EUGENIA, after an immeasurable display of impassioned virtuosity. Chapman in general, to put it briefly, cannot see his wood for his trees; and that is the trouble here.

To elude all these considerations by such phrases as "fanciful and unlikely," applied to an unscanned hypothesis which is reached from a multitude of data, is not a critical proceeding. Fanciful and unlikely hypotheses, in fact, have no terrors for Professor Adams when they come to him within the academic quadrangle of canonical orthodoxy. He does not blench, for instance, at the fantastic notion that the "author" of EDWARD III "may be George Peele."¹ That simply cannot be. The play clearly shows several hands, Peele being probably the smallest contributor; and Peele could no more have written the Countess scenes than he could have written CORIOLANUS. With the same pliability, taking advantage of one academic

¹ *Life* cited, p. 163 note.

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liberty, the Professor is even content to assert (p. 136) that I HENRY VI is "a play by George Peele, possibly assisted by Robert Greene." Thus to refuse to see in a large part of I HENRY VI, and notably in the opening scene, the hand of Marlowe, is to exhibit a judgment for which the fanciful and the unlikely have, as such, no repellent features.

But these hardy substitutions of random guesswork for inductive method are outgone by the Professor's own and unaided hypothesis (p. 132) that the COMEDY OF ERRORS was penned by Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon, before coming to London. This is in effect to say that Shakespeare, in his capacity of "country schoolmaster" (a myth which the Professor readily assimilates), wrote a working modern play before he could know what modern plays were, and, what is so much more exorbitant, invented Marlovian blank verse before Marlowe had written any. Such lawless liberties of fancy, such unconcern for the deterrence of the unlikely, may be admitted to deprive the Professor's vetoes of primary authority where he dispenses himself from the procedures commonly held to be required for a process of rebuttal.

Professor Adams's "chief difficulty" is in fact no difficulty; and his position merely evades insuperable difficulties. The student may or may not accept as adequate the evidence that points to the work as Chapman's; but if he realises that between the two internecine views of "early style" and "late style" the Shakespearean authorship is really untenable, he has a new reason for questioning the canonical authority of Thorpe's Quarto. And if a non-Shakespearean poem could thus be foisted by Thorpe on the public, what reason can there be for believing, on the bare strength of his title-page, that all of the Sonnets are Shakespeare's?

The real critical "difficulty" is that while many of

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them arouse the strongest critical suspicion, many more are not only credibly his but not credibly assignable to any one else, known or unknown. That the best of Elizabethan sonneteers should be a quite unknown poet is too unlikely to be arguable. That the chief sonneteer was in close touch with the work of Shakespeare is clear. But still there is no warrant for the assumption that Thorpe's collection is wholly Shakespearean. The problem must just be grappled with in detail.

CHAPTER II

THE " BEGETTING " OF THE SONNETS

THE first inference reasonably to be drawn from the manner of the issue of the Sonnets by Thorpe in 1609 is that it was done without Shakespeare's knowledge or permission. As we have seen, the contrary view has been advanced; and Grant White even suggested that Shakespeare may have sold his Sonnets and thus lost control over them. Dr. Rolfe in his 'Life of Shakespeare' (1902) treats as "far from conclusive" such proofs of piracy as the dedication by the publisher and the many misprints, but at the same time claims to have been the first to show that the brackets placed at the end of Sonnet 126, mistakenly indicating missing lines, cannot have been so marked either by Shakespeare or by a printer or publisher in communication by him. The fact is certainly almost decisive, but hardly more so than the misprints in general, the matter and manner of the publisher's dedication, and the title, which almost avows non-authorisation.

There is another piece of evidence which it may be worth while to keep in view. Philarète Chasles, who was one of the first of modern critics to study the original Quarto,¹ makes the interesting remark that it is printed upon "*fort vilain papier*," which suggests impecuniosity on Thorpe's part, and does not suggest complicity on the part of the then prosperous Shakespeare, still less any promotion of the publication by a man of rank, as is suggested by several theorists.

The contemptuous dismissal of all such considerations by Dr. Creighton² is typical of his stout fashion

¹ *L'Angleterre au Seizième Siècle*, 1879, pp. 69, 74.

² *Shakespeare's Story of his Life*, 1904, p. 19.

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of fictive biography. "The most damnable of all the recent heresies," writes that dauntless seer, "is, that his Sonnets were abstracted from the author's desk,¹ and published without his leave by a low bookseller. . . . The *single* ground of this queer hypothesis is, that the dedication of the volume is made by the publisher and not by the author. . . . How can any one maintain that the Quarto of 1609 had not been prepared for the press by the author himself? The longer sequence of one hundred and twenty-six Sonnets is, at all events, a natural order, which hardly admits of rearrangement and *must* have been designed." Those who have observed the kind and the number of things "maintained" by Dr. Creighton in his happy manipulation of Shakespeare's life and works are bound to note the sudden concern here exhibited for evidence; but may be content to reply (1) that utter disregard by an author of the manifold mangling of his alleged works in the press is really not plausibly to be urged as proof of his complicity in their publication; and (2) that the frequent separation of Sonnets upon one theme, and the chronic disruption of topic and tone and temper in the Sonnets in the published order, can be "natural" only for abnormal readers.

Professor Tucker, seeking to maintain a judicial attitude on this as on other problems set up by the Quarto, sums up² that "We are scarcely in a position to say positively whether the poet himself did or did not give his sanction to the dedication. That he did not personally revise the publication itself is clear from the mass of textual errors." This substantially amounts to coming down on the negative side; and as Professor Tucker expressly comments (p. liii) on the lack of "decent taste and ordinary chivalry" in most of the

¹ It is perhaps unnecessary to remark that this proposition has never been publicly advanced by anybody.

² Introduction to his edition of the Sonnets, 1924, pp. xxxviii-ix.

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"dark woman" Sonnets, he would seem in fairness bound to give the poet the full benefit of the doubt at least as to publication, even if he reckons all the Sonnets in question as certainly of Shakespeare's writing.

It might surely be conceded, finally, that a poet of Shakespeare's quality would be extremely unlikely to authorise the publication not only of the Dark Lady Sonnets but of a number of others. In the words of Mr. Robert Shindler: "A man whose friend has robbed him of his mistress does not generally want to announce the fact." And if it be conceded that *any* of the Sonnets are probably not Shakespeare's, that is an argument the more against his authorisation of the Quarto.

In view, then, of the arguments already cited, we may say that all the appearances and all the probabilities are so entirely against Shakespeare's being a consenting party, that the negative may be taken as common ground for serious criticism. It happens to be so taken by nineteen out of twenty critics. There is, however, a further probability which has not been discussed, to wit, that Thorpe's edition, which had no successor in that age, was suppressed before it had much sale. Such suppression had overtaken WILLOBIE HIS AVISA; and in this case there were about as good reasons as in that. Those who vote for Mary Fitton as the Dark Lady, and those who vote for Mistress Davenant, would seem at least equally constrained to admit as much. And the proposition of Wyndham,¹ that Shakespeare made "no protest against the form in which [the Sonnets] appeared," like that of Professor Mackail, that "Shakespeare never took the pains . . . to stop their publication,"² is, I submit, insusceptible of proof. For all we know, he did take the pains.

¹ *The Poems of Shakespeare*, 1898, Introduction, p. cix.

² *Lectures on Poetry*, 1911, p. 179.

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The Thorpe Quarto is now a very rare book;¹ yet the natural presumption would be that in 1609, at the height of Shakespeare's contemporary fame, it would have found a considerable sale if it were not interfered with; and that a second edition would have followed in a few years. Even after the decline of the sonneteering fashion, the sonnets of Daniel and Drayton and some others went on selling. It is true that the Benson collection of 1640 is now also extremely rare. But by 1640 the taste for sonnets had passed away; and the sale would naturally be small. Carew (1640) has, I think, but one sonnet; and Milton's three-and-twenty (1645), mostly of a new temper, created no new fashion. Herrick (1647) has none. Thorpe's Quarto belongs to the sonnet age, and its failure to reach a second edition calls for an explanation that has not yet been forthcoming. There can, of course, be no certainty; but there is fair ground for a presumption that Thorpe's book was stopped, whether through the intervention of Shakespeare or another. So far as we can guess, "another" is perhaps the more likely solution, though the alternative may be the right one.

There is, however, yet another reason for supposing that Thorpe's venture was interfered with; and it partly suggests that the interference may have been on the part of Shakespeare. On January 3, 1600, not long after the issue of the *PASSIONATE PILGRIM*, a publisher entered in the Stationers' Register "A book called *AMOURS* by J. D., with certain other *SONNETS* by W. S."; which book, however, was not published. As Professor J. Q. Adams² observes: "It has been customary for scholars to assume that the entry referred to a hypothetical cycle by William Smith, whose collection entitled *CHLORIS* had been issued in 1596. But there is no evidence that Smith composed a second

¹ According to Lee, some twelve copies are known.

² *Life of William Shakespeare*, p. 166.

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cycle, and no reason why the entry may not refer to Shakespeare's Sonnets." It obviously may; and on that view the natural presumption would be that Shakespeare [or another, possibly J. D.=John Donne (?) or Sir John Davies (?)] stopped the enterprise. When, further, we learn that "At the time that the Sonnets issued from the press the author's company were itinerating in Kent, playing at Hythe on the sixteenth of May and at New Romney on the following day"; and that Thorpe's entry in the register was made on May 20,¹ we have even reason to surmise that Thorpe took the opportunity of Shakespeare's absence to launch his undertaking. On the other hand, if he were not travelling with his company, but staying at Stratford, the opportunity would be the same.

As against this inference, however, there stands the theory of Fleay² that, on the Southampton hypothesis, Southampton would be likely to desire the preservation of such a mass of fine poetic work, and might naturally entrust his copies to Hervey for publication in such a fashion as would conceal his own connection with the matter. We are thus sent back to the "W. H." problem, with the query whether, and how, Hervey could be regarded as "onlie begetter." Now, the really plausible aspect of the Hervey clue is that that gallant gentleman, who later became the husband of the Countess of Southampton, after the death of Heneage, her second husband, may well have been her intermediary in inducing Shakespeare to write the early Sonnets³ which seek to persuade a certain young man to marry—the young man, on that view, being the young Southampton.

¹ Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, 8th edition, i, 226-7.

² *Biog. Chron.*, ii, 212.

³ "Possibly the original suggester of their being written," are Fleay's own words, p. 211; and in the previous *Life* (above cited, p. 5), we have the same proposition.

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For the writing of those first seventeen Sonnets really requires *some* such causation.¹ Without it, the whole procedure, on Shakespeare's part, is incredibly fantastic. And it is much more likely that Shakespeare should be commissioned, about 1591-3, by the mother of Southampton, to persuade her son, aged about twenty, to marry, than that in *or before* 1598 he was so commissioned by the Earl or the Countess of Pembroke to urge marriage on their son William, who only in that year came to London at the age of eighteen, and who had a brother to carry on his line. Lady Southampton's reasons for getting her son married to Burleigh's granddaughter, Elizabeth Vere, were weighty and pressing. She was² ill-supplied with ready-money; she was a Catholic, liable to fiscal exactions; Burleigh was powerful to shield her and hers from such pressures; and Burleigh was anxious for the match. It was not a mere matter of "doting," as Grant White's phrase suggests. The situation was quite specially urgent, and warranted special measures, such as a series of poetic appeals. The difficulty is to fix dates.

In Southampton's case the supposition is the more highly plausible, inasmuch as we find Shakespeare dedicating the *VENUS* to him in 1593, and the *LUCRECE* in 1594. Fleay, however, decides that the Sonnets were begun only after May, 1594, *because* some of them imply references to the *LUCRECE* dedication—an inference which is obviously reversible. "*After* the *LUCRECE* dedication," he writes,³ "Shakespeare became personally acquainted with Southampton"; and again

¹ "Nothing could be more unnatural as from one young man to another" (wrote Mr. G. B. Shaw in 1910); "and nothing could be more natural if Mr. W. H.'s mother asked Shakespeare to do it." Read "the young recipient's mother," and the argument is incontestable.

² See Mrs. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Environment*, pp. 145-160.

³ *Biog. Chron.*, ii, 214.

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(p. 217): "the early Sonnets 1-17 being, in my opinion, written after he [Southampton] met Elizabeth Vernon in 1595. I think it more likely that the poet should encourage his known passion by urging marriage on him than that he should venture to initiate such a subject before his own inclination had been disclosed."

Few theorists have so mishandled their own case as Fleay does here—apparently under stress of a theoretic chronology for particular Sonnets. To pronounce that Southampton was already in love (and, as is implied in the term "inclination," with no known aversion from marrying) when the Sonnets urging him to marry were written, is to make them newly unintelligible. Fleay's own surmise that Hervey may have been the "instigator" of the early Sonnets supplies the whole necessary explanation of the "venture." It would indeed have been an astonishing course for Shakespeare to urge marriage on a young nobleman as he did, without an express commission such as we have inferred; but it would have been a perfectly preposterous course for him thus zealously to urge it on a youth who actually wanted to marry, as we know Southampton began to do in 1595.

Fleay's theory of dates, further, virtually implies that Shakespeare had dedicated both of his poems to Southampton without permission—a very unlikely proceeding even now, and excessively unlikely then. And there is no need to make such an extravagant assumption. It is in every way likely that the playhaunting Southampton had known of Shakespeare's work—say, in the opening scene of the COMEDY OF ERRORS and in the quatrain dialogue—as early as 1591,¹ and may even then have made his acquaintance. If, then, we assume that Southampton was known by his family and friends to be interested in the young

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part II, pp. 146-8, as to the dating of the ERRORS.

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actor-poet, and his mother was on good grounds anxious to have him marry soon, William Hervey¹ may very well have been the intermediary employed by her to commission the poet to write those Sonnets, which cannot reasonably be supposed to have been written without such a commission from somebody. And the writing of some such Sonnets would furnish a very natural ground upon which Shakespeare might obtain the necessary permission to dedicate the VENUS in 1593. On any view, "acquaintance" is reasonably to be assumed to have begun in some sort before either dedication could be ventured on.

On the other hand, there is something to be said for the view that the VENUS preceded the matrimonial Sonnets. Given a previous acquaintance, the poem might have been shown to Southampton, or, it might be, to Hervey, in order to win permission for the dedication; and it might be argued that the often-cited lines of the VENUS (162-174) in which Adonis is urged by the goddess to reproduce himself could have suggested to Hervey, and through him to the Countess, the idea of commissioning the young poet to write the persuasive Sonnets. It is, perhaps, arguable that this is more likely than that Shakespeare should have used again in the published poem the very phrases and arguments he had used in the Sonnets to persuade to lawful matrimony a youth not at all to be suspected of sheer coldness. But there is considerably more force, surely, in the counter-argument that the early Sonnets gave the poet a cue for parts of his first poem. It is not merely that the Sonnets, not being meant for publication, *could* be drawn upon for a published poem without open repetition. There is a much stronger argument than that.

¹ Mrs. Stopes informs me that in her *Shakespeare's Environment*, p. 148, and in her *Life of Southampton*, there is an error of mistranscription, the name given as Hervey being found to be Hare. But this does not affect the general argument.

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What primary plausibility, it may be asked, even on the most liberal conception of poetic license, is there in representing the enamoured Venus as wooing Adonis with an argument to the effect that he ought to have a child? Is it the kind of appeal that would seem likely to suggest itself in any episode of *seduction*, on either side? And would it have suggested itself to Shakespeare, or to anyone else, a priori, as a likely appeal from a goddess to a mortal? There is no hint of it in his source in Ovid's *METAMORPHOSES*, an old-world tale which he has completely denaturalised for his dramatic-idyllic purpose. His cue was given him in the song of Infida in Greene's *NEVER TOO LATE* (1590), which in musical verse introduces the theme of the languishing Venus and the cold Adonis. In Ovid, as in the Greek ritual of a thousand years, Adonis is Aphrodite's paramour; and the modernist realism of our poem is superimposed for its own sake. Shakespeare knew indeed that Æneas was Venus's son by Anchises. Of the Homeridian hymn to Aphrodite (not yet translated by Chapman) he probably knew nothing. If he had known that there the goddess professes to be a mortal, lest Anchises be terrified, it might have suggested to him some such graceful Greek turn for his graceless and very un-Greek performance,¹ but it could never have suggested to him the notion that his un-divine Venus should argue with his un-human Adonis on the desirability of her making him a father.

Neither theory nor experience could point to the desire for offspring as matter for seductive appeal to a frosty youth, any more than to a virgin. Shakespeare,

¹ I regret to have to differ *toto cælo*, on this head, from Mr. Acheson (*Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*, p. 129). To call the Adonis and Venus of our poem "an ideal Greek god and an ideal Greek goddess" is a strange perversity of criticism. It does not need such false judgments to bear out the simple proposition that Shakespeare's poem is more attractive than Chapman's *Banquet*.

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in fact, knew this as well as we. He makes his Adonis fly out (l. 770) at "your idle over-handled theme," with the added apostrophe (l. 791):

You do it for increase ; O strange excuse !

But if we suppose the early Sonnets, urging marriage on the young Southampton for sound English family reasons, to have been previously written, it is perfectly conceivable that they might supply the young poet with some items of poetic conversation in a discursive poem, written for the market in a time of closed theatres, on the subject of the realistic amour of a Renaissance Venus for a new Adonis. In order to pen a poem long enough to make a book, he had to "vamp"; and anything that served for some not too irrelevant stanzas was grist for the mill. Some of the excrescent matter, such as the descriptions of the horse and the hare-coursing, is of the best texture in the poem: the philoprogenitive thesis is otherwise; but still it served for four or five stanzas of expatiation. If there is any other way of accounting for that singular item of amatory appeal, it would be interesting to know it. Hitherto the editors have never asked themselves the question.

The only counter-argument which suggests itself is that the theme of "increase" was familiar in poetry and prose—it occurs in Sidney's *ARCADIA*, for instance—before 1591, and was doubtless quite common in everyday life. Shakespeare, then, it may be argued, could have used it in the *VENUS* without having previously employed it in the Sonnets. But the answer is the same. The use of it in the *VENUS* is so incongruous, so ill-motivated, that it could not have been spontaneous; and the only plausible explanation is that he *had* been using such matter in the Sonnets and could conveniently fill some stanzas by using it again.

This suggestion is not at all frivolous. Elsewhere

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I have undertaken to show that Marlowe's *HERO AND LEANDER* bears marks of being partly developed from poetic matter in *ROMEO AND JULIET* which there is reason to regard as of Marlowe's own drafting.¹ On that view, Marlowe in his poem has made effective use of ideas that had served him in drama. Either that was so, or we must regard Shakespeare as knowing Marlowe's poem in manuscript and turning it to account in the play; and on either view such a process of adaptation of already used poetic matter could occur, on the part of a gifted poet, in the ordinary way of Elizabethan poetic art. There was no scruple about a repeated use of the same ideas; and, when all is said, repetition certainly takes place as between the Sonnets and the *VENUS*. We seem to see the eking-out process, further, in the *VENUS* passages which echo passages in *TITUS*; though there it may be that Peele is echoing the poem, which phrases so much more firmly the ideas we find in the flaccid lines of the play.

If we take the Sonnets as coming before the *VENUS*, we are in full keeping with the apparent chronology. Burleigh's project for marrying Southampton to his granddaughter seems to have been mooted in 1590, and may have been on foot till the end of 1592, when, probably, Shakespeare wrote the *VENUS AND ADONIS*. Either way, we may provisionally date the early Sonnets 1591-2, and infer that their acceptance led to the closer intimacy implied in the dedication of *LUCRECE*. And, either way, Hervey may have been the intermediary.

If, then, Hervey had been the intermediary of the Countess (who was much more likely thus to employ a trusted friend than to communicate in person with the young actor, though Sonnet 10, with its "for love of me," and Sonnet 13, with its "dear my love," may very well have been written for her to *present*), he could be described as the "begetter" of the Sonnets in a much

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part III, pp. 163, 175 *seq.*

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more fitting sense than that which is set up by the notion of "procurer" or "obtainer" of the manuscript for publication. Fleay, who admits that "beget" did not mean "obtain" even in the sixteenth century, has strained his theory unnecessarily by finally making Hervey merely the channel of publication. As Fleay originally argued, he can be understood as the original *instigator*.

He may further, for all we know, have been the instigator of other sonnets, in that or other connections; and, what is not the least important possibility, he may have been a recipient of friendly sonnets on his own account. He is, in fact, a not impossible candidate in connection with the "Will" sonnets, which are surely not Shakespeare's. The date of his birth appears to be unrecorded; but as he lived till 1642 he was presumably younger than Shakespeare, even though he distinguished himself in 1588, against the Armada. But we are not tied down to the supposition that Thorpe knew all that was to be known about all the Sonnets; and when every theorist is obliged to admit that "onlie" is not to be taken literally, it is not reasonably to be pressed against the Hervey hypothesis in particular.

[That hypothesis, indeed, has one apparent difficulty of its own, as against the many difficulties of every other. Hervey was knighted in 1596 for his gallantry at Cadiz; and it may be objected that he is not likely to have been indicated as "'Mr.' W. H." in 1609. But this argument, to begin with, cannot be used either by the adherents of the Pembroke theory or by those who assume Southampton to have been indicated by reversed initials. Hervey *was* "Mr. W. H." when, on our hypothesis, he set Shakespeare at work sonnetting; and if we are to allow anything at all for the expediency of partial secrecy—such as is on any view implied in the use of initials—the allusion to Hervey

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as "Mr. W. H.," which he actually had been before 1596, is much less unlikely than such an allusion with reference to either of the Earls. The difficulty, however, seems to disappear altogether when we note that to speak of a knight as "Mr." was in that age not uncommon. The Countess of Southampton, it would appear, always so alluded to her second husband, Sir Thomas Heneage.¹

Beyond that, in this connection, we are not entitled to go. Though this is the one really plausible "W. H." solution yet advanced, it is idle to pretend that we have earned the certitude that has been so lightly assumed for so many other hypotheses. Thorpe's dedication remains enigmatic in the lack of documentary verification; for no one who has read his "dedication" of Marlowe's version of Lucan will regard him as a person to be reckoned either scrupulous in business matters or lucid in statement. We can but seek circumspectly to frame the most reasonable hypothesis that the data suggest and admit of, recognising that hypotheses they remain.

Furthermore, we have to recognise the possibility, if not the likelihood, that Hervey may have commissioned more poets than one. That possibility has to be brought, ultimately, to the tests of authorship when we come to make them; but it is fitly to be kept in mind in our reading of the Sonnets from the start. Granting that "Mr. W. H." was in a definite sense the "only begetter" or "chief begetter" of the main or of a large part, the bare title of "Shakespeare's Sonnets," with no pretence of authorisation from that poet, nay, with an implicit confession that none had been given, ought not to secure our unquestioning acceptance of Shakespeare's sole authorship. It is our business to read critically, assuming tentatively that the Sonnets have in general a connection with the begetter, and,

¹ Mrs. Stopes, *Introd. to her ed. of the Sonnets*, p. xlv.

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through him, with the chief addressee, but always asking ourselves whether we are really reading Shakespeare. So doing, we shall find strong reasons for doubt after we have passed the 17th: and, it may be, some reasons for doubt even before we reach it.

With regard finally, to the publication of the Sonnets in 1609, we are not entitled to suppose that Southampton, as Fleay surmises, handed his manuscript collection to Hervey with instructions for publication. We are not even entitled to assume that Southampton *had* all the Sonnets, much less to assume that, if the mass of them referred to himself, he would desire to have them published, even under a disguise. One ground for regarding him as the source is the plausible hypothesis, first advanced by Mr. Mackail, that A LOVER'S COMPLAINT, considered as non-Shakespearean, may be supposed to have been submitted to Southampton, as patron, by a "rival poet," and may happen to have been bundled up with the Sonnets. But Hervey, if we suppose him to have been the intermediary "begetter" as aforesaid, may very well have had copies of all or many of Shakespeare's Sonnets and also of other sonnets and poems submitted or addressed to Southampton. And of such sonnets and poems there may have been made for him a transcript, in an album, frequently added to. If, then, Thorpe's Quarto was suppressed, it may have been through the action of Hervey on his own part, or on behalf of other parties concerned. He was a man of note and influence.

Further, if we admit the likelihood that he is the intermediary who first set Shakespeare to sonneting, it is not an unreasonable hypothesis that he would remain in touch with the young poet, and might be in possession of copies of Sonnets by him which had no direct connection with Southampton at all, and which he might keep with yet others addressed to South-

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ampton, or to others, by other pens. This is but a list of possibilities. But it is important to keep the range of possibilities in sight. How a collection belonging to Hervey should come into the hands of Thorpe is a question on which we can but speculate. There is, however, no difficulty in supposing that such a collection might be lent, and pass from hand to hand as so many manuscripts did in that age; and, so passing, it might miscarry, as so many a manuscript is known to have done.

We know that "the main part of Sidney's work, which is known under the title of *ASTROPHEL AND STELLA*, circulated among his friends in manuscript for eleven years before it was printed posthumously in 1591,"¹ and that the first edition of that was surreptitious; while the second, though the publisher claims to have carefully collated various MSS., is his own venture. Similarly, the publisher of Barnabe Barnes's *PARTHENOPHIL AND PARTHENOPHE* collection, who dedicates it to "M. William Percy, Esq., his dearest friend" ("his" apparently meaning "the poet's"), declares that "These labours following, being come of late into my hands barely, without title or subscription," he was about to print them, and only through the friends of the author, "at the first unknown," obtained his consent. There is, in fact, no author's name on the title-page, the identification being made only through the Stationers' Register. Barnes evidently needed little persuading, though withholding his name; but there seems no sufficient reason to doubt that the MS. reached the printer's hands without his knowledge or permission; though his friends may have had good grounds for believing that he would consent.

¹ Lee, Introduction to "Elizabethan Sonnets," in *An English Garner*, ed. 1904, I, p. xxxvii.

CHAPTER III

THE SOUTHAMPTON CONNECTION AND OTHER CLUES

THE main enigma of the Sonnets begins to obtrude itself when we pass the first group, and enter on the apparent evolution from an attitude of adoring admonition to one of deepening intimacy. It is true that in Sonnets 10 ("for love of me") and 13 ("dear my love") there is already a note of intimacy. But if we suppose those Sonnets to have been written for the mother to present to her son, this creates no difficulty. It has been noted that Sonnet 13 is the first which employs the address "you" instead of "thou." The "you," says Mr. Pooler, is less formal. And, though there was a formal use of "you,"¹ and though there are many later "thou" Sonnets which imply special intimacy, we can readily hear in the "you" of No. 13 a key of intimacy such as a mother might best employ; though the same mother might have used the chiding "thou" of Sonnet 10—there being then a usage of "thou" in chiding (and otherwise) between those of one family, as well as an informal use of "you." It is when the marriage motive is left behind, and the Sonnets convey rather a personal tribute than an appeal, that we are faced by an intimacy not thus explicable.

That this intimacy was still with Southampton is the natural surmise, if we continue to date the early Sonnets as running from 1591-3. And as this issue is vital, it is necessary to consider carefully the mass of evidence which, from Malone onwards, has served to

¹ Sir John Davies's dedicatory address to Prince Henry employs only "you."

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convince so many students that the early Sonnets belong to the "period" of the Poems and the early Plays, in despite of the arguments of others who, leaning or clinging to the Pembroke solution, are either eager or ready to date the whole mass from 1598, the year in which Meres testifies that Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets" were already current among his "private friends." Let it be noted at the outset that there is thus far involved no exclusion of Pembroke from a connection with later Sonnets. On that view, some may find it easier to keep open minds.

To a loyal induction, further, be it repeated, it is necessary that from the outset we remember that we have no right of certainty as to Shakespeare's being the actual author of every Sonnet in the collection. The majority of critical readers, probably, are now satisfied to dismiss the "trivial" pieces (145, 153, 154) as non-Shakespearean. It is then admitted to be possible that alien sonnets may have been included in the early and median as well as in the later portions of the bundle. And no less are we debarred from taking for granted that even in the genuine Sonnets Shakespeare is always writing *in his own person*. The fact that the "dramatic" theory has been arbitrarily developed is not an excuse for refusing to recognise the possibilities of "mouthpiece" work at any point in the series. The reasonable presumption is, in fact, that a poet who, as we have inferred, began writing sonnets "to order," on a commission, would be ready to write further sonnets upon other commissions. And every Sonnet in turn ought to be scrutinised in the light of that possibility, as well as of the risk of non-authenticity.

It may be well to make both points clear by illustrations before we proceed to the evidence for an early dating. Let us take Sonnet 23, which might readily pass as not only Shakespearean but the utterance of Shakespeare in his own person from the first line:

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As an unperfect actor on the stage,
 Who with his fear is put beside his part,
 Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
 Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart ;
 So I, for fear of trust,¹ forget to say
 The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
 And to mine own love's strength seem to decay,
 O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might.
 O, let my looks² be then the eloquence
 And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
 Who plead for love, and look for recompense,
 More than that tongue that more³ hath more expressed.
 O, learn to read what silent love hath writ :
 To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

This Sonnet Mr. Forrest confidently pronounces non-Shakespearean, assigning it (p. 53) to "the Humorist" competitor (Donne), and underlining the words "dumb" and "speaking," with side reference to No. 38 (assigned to Barnes). Thus a Sonnet which in itself sets up *no* humorous impression, and which gives no hint of being addressed to a patron, is read as making adulation of a patron "the perfect ceremony of love's rite." Such an interpretation and such an assignment might almost serve to discredit subjective criticism in such matters. Massey, on the other hand, gives the Sonnet to Shakespeare speaking in his own person, because he adheres to the impossible Quarto reading, "books," understanding "books of sonnets." But to call books, whether of sonnet sequences or anything else, "*dumb* presagers of my *speaking* breast," when the breast is avowedly *not* speaking, is to put

¹ *I.e.*, for fear of being distrusted, or for self-distrust.

² *Q. books.* "Looks," first proposed by Sewell, is accepted by Beeching.

³ Staunton reads *love* ; Butler (very ingeniously) *less*. Mr. Walsh (p. 269) suggests "hath o'er exprest." The problem is, whether "that tongue" is the speaker's or another's. If his, the right word might be "unexpressed."

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mere countersense.¹ The phrase is but a variant of the "dumb eloquence" and "silent rhetoric" of the sonneteers, derided by Jonson; and the reading "looks" at once, and alone, makes sense of the whole passage and the whole Sonnet. "To hear with eyes" means "to read my face, my looks."

Butler in turn, rightly reading "looks," and plausibly suggesting the reading "that less hath more express'd" in the twelfth line, labels the Sonnet, in his automatic way: "To Mr. W. H. Shakespeare's looks must say what he cannot *bring* his tongue to speak"—with Butler's usual repulsive implication. What the Sonnet does tell is that the speaker, in his trepidation, forgets to say "the perfect ceremony of love's rite." And while Shakespeare, like another, might in a state of perturbation find it difficult to express in speech an emotion (though that was not his reputation), it is hard to imagine him writing in his own person a Sonnet *expressing* love, and in that Sonnet asking that his countenance shall be regarded as the real utterance of his feelings. That confusing conception was doubtless the motive for Massey's and Fleay's adherence to the false reading "books." But if we make the supposition that the Sonnet was written by the poet *for another*, to send to a woman—say, for Southampton addressing Elizabeth Vernon, or for Sir Thomas Heneage wooing the Countess of Southampton in 1594, or for Hervey wooing her after Heneage's death in 1595—it becomes at once wholly natural and intelligible. And, though we are clearly not entitled to certitude, it is quite reasonable to suppose that after writing the early matrimonial Sonnets "by request" Shakespeare might write love Sonnets *on behalf of* either Southampton or another. As Mr. Walsh has independently remarked (p. 269), "It is

¹ Dowden and Craig, who thus argue for "books," do not seem to have realised what they were saying.

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as likely as not that this Sonnet was addressed to a mistress."

On the point of authenticity, again, let us take Sonnet 55, passed, I think, by every commentator, with the partial exception of Mr. Walsh,¹ as just one of the many in the collection promising immortality to the patron. Mr. Forrest so treats it, without, however, dubbing it at his outset either Shakespearean or non-Shakespearean, though he assigns it later (p. 38) to "the Minor Poet," Barnabe Barnes, underlining words which connect it with No. 18 (ranked as Shakespearean) and No. 81 (assigned to 'the Humorist'). For the one-idea'd Butler (here following Tyler), 55 is addressed "To Mr. W. H. Apparently *suggested by* the last line of the preceding Sonnet"; which in turn is accounted for as "suggested by the last line" of the one before *it*—perhaps the most inept of all the propositions advanced as to sequences in these Sonnets or in any other set. Where no other commentator has recognised the exceptional character of Sonnet 55, however, Butler is perhaps not specially to be pilloried for missing evidence to which his rigid presupposition closed his eyes.

The puzzle is, that what is so plainly a complimentary Sonnet, possibly designed to be printed as such *with a poem by another*, in the common Elizabethan fashion, should so invariably pass without critical recognition as such. Thus it runs:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of Princes, shall outlive this powerful rime ;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.

¹ Only recently, after having held my own interpretation for nearly fifty years, have I taken note of Oscar Wilde's argument, in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," that this Sonnet pointed to *Romeo and Juliet*. But though this indicates a perception of another kind of application than the traditional, it is bound up with the thesis which Wilde tentatively suggests—that the Sonnets are addressed to a Willie Hughes, a young actor ; and it assumes Shakespeare's authorship.

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When wasteful war shall statues overturn
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth ; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doome.
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

It is always hard to appreciate the convention, deriving from Pindar and Horace and Ovid and Maistre Wace¹ and Petrarch, under which the Renaissance poet, with or without thought of print, complacently announces that his verse is going to immortalise either a named or an unnamed recipient; but if we read this Sonnet under that rubric it becomes a prodigy in its kind. Clearly second-rate, if not third-rate, in its diction, it assures the addressee, on that view, that its "powerful rhyme," its shining contents, its power of living record, will preserve "in this" his nameless memory to all posterity, especially among lovers. The open-minded reader who will consent to regard "this," provisionally, as a typical complimentary sonnet to an author, fitly to be printed with others at the head of his book, either in the first or in a second edition, will probably admit that only so *can* it be read, and that to include it among sonnets to a patron, promising him immortality *through itself*, is to reduce to mere fatuity a poem that in its honest poverty could otherwise pass muster in the crowd of such things.

Nothing could well be more arbitrary, on the other hand, than the pronouncement by which Professor Tucker, in his edition of the Sonnets, seeks to parry the criticism incurred by the Sonnet under the interpretation of it as a pæan to a patron. "The poet," he

¹ See p. 13 of Dr. Philpot's *Maistre Wace* (Methuen, 1925).

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writes,¹ "is not praising his own verse, as if of a 'powerful' kind. He means simply that verse is a specially potent form of commemoration. Least of all does he mean the present Sonnet." But on the Professor's own interpretation of the whole he is either praising "the present Sonnet" or the whole set of Sonnets preceding it, and the self-praise is the same either way. The words "*in this*," as it happens, expressly specify "the present Sonnet" for the candid reader, on the old theory of it. And when the Professor annotates the last line thus: "Not=you will be read by lovers (who read love-poems), but=persons who will love you, though dead, as men love you in life," he is making the sonneteer fatuously predict that his powerful rhyme and "these contents" will make all posterity love the unnamed subject of his panegyric. All these rackings of a misconceived text are got rid of by recognising that the Sonnet is what any reader would have seen it to be had it appeared among the "sonnets prefatory" to an Elizabethan love-poem, meant for "lovers' eyes" in the natural sense which Professor Tucker seeks to destroy.

To the present writer, at the first critical reading, many years ago, it suggested either a poem addressed to Shakespeare, on the occasion of his *VENUS AND ADONIS*; or a poem to Marlowe, on a perusal of his two cantos of *HERO AND LEANDER* in manuscript; or possibly to Chapman for his *OVID'S BANQUET*, to which five complimentary sonnets are actually prefixed in the edition of 1595. "This powerful rhyme" plainly points to an indicated poem; "these contents" carries on the theme; "the living record of your memory" is the said poem, its author being "you"; and the last line, "You live *in this*, and dwell *in lovers' eyes*," expressly points to a love poem of some kind, written by the addressee, which *will be read by lovers*.

¹ Ed. cited, p. 130.

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Thus we make simple sense of what was impossibly hyperbolic nonsense.

Was it written *to* Shakespeare, or *by* him, or neither? On mature consideration, though I long hesitated, I cannot believe it to be of his writing: the rhythm is too stiffly iambic for that; the diction and phrasing are too far below his average level, too conventional from start to finish, too obviously lacking in the *cantabile* quality which marks all his certain verse, rhymed or unrhymed, from his outset. We shall find difficulty, indeed, in fixing on sound tests by which to try the subjective criticism that boldly denies his authorship of most of the Sonnets; but here all the aspects of the matter are antagonistic to acceptance. Only the relative sonority of the first two lines can encourage it; and that is no uncommon thing in Elizabethan sonneting. When, then, Mr. Walsh, for once extravagant, tells us (p. 265) "It is possible that Shakespeare was here apostrophising himself, and intended this for his closing Sonnet. Accordingly, Mr. Godwin puts it last in his rearrangement," we must respectfully protest that Mr. Godwin is not thus to be followed, even in a spirit of lightness. Even without referring to the "my *barren* rime" of Sonnet 16, and "this *poor* rime" of Sonnet 107, we are on all grounds entitled to deny that Shakespeare could do any such thing as apostrophising himself in this stumping fashion, even if he wrote Sonnets 17, 18, and 19.

And this Sonnet raises the chronological issue as well as that of authenticity. Tyler has made an impression among the commentators by pointing out that the Horatian and Ovidian clues, noted by Malone, were collocated by Meres in his account of Shakespeare's poetry in 1598, and arguing that the Sonnet is accordingly to be referred to that passage for its inspiration. Mr. Walsh seems to assent, writing that "This Sonnet, then, must have been written in or after that year."

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It is thus made to come into line with the Pembroke theory.

But Mr. Acheson, sworn to another Dark Lady than Mary Fitton, has shown that Tyler's inference is unsound as to Meres. Himself quite unsuspecting as to either Shakespeare's authorship of the Sonnet or its traditional interpretation, he finds it to be the last of one of his sequences, "which seems exultantly to epitomise the intention and spirit of the nine preceding Sonnets," thus reducing it to hyperbolical absurdity, as do his predecessors. When, however, he investigates Meres¹ he decisively overturns Tyler's inference. Sonnet 55, he justly claims,² derives from other Ovidian passages as well as from those quoted by Meres, and in particular from Elegy XV of B. I of the AMORES, which had furnished the motto for the VENUS AND ADONIS. On the common ground, then, of the assumption that Shakespeare wrote Sonnet 55, Mr. Acheson proves that "Meres reflects Shakespeare, and not Shakespeare Meres."³

Thus, on the chronological point as on the other, we are entitled to say that Tyler's argument breaks down, and that there is no ground for dating the Sonnet as late as 1598. At that date it would be, for Shakespeare, doubly poor; and it could have been written by a person of average scholarly knowledge years before; as, on the other hand, Meres might very well have made his citations from Ovid and Horace without having seen the Sonnet; though it is not inconceivable that he may have written it in 1593. All the passages alike were familiar; and not only had the AMORES been translated (though the version was not printed

¹ *Shakespeare's Sonnet Story*, 1922, p. 247 *seq.*

² In his very pertinent transcriptions from Ovid's elegy, as in his reproductions of those cited by Tyler, however, Mr. Acheson passes "more mistakes than the words admit of." So many misprints, probably, were never made in the space.

³ *Id.*, pp. 248, 251.

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in his lifetime) by Marlowe, but Ben Jonson had probably done his recast of Marlowe's version of Elegy XV years before the publication. In any case, Marlowe's version, current in MS., had drawn fresh attention to the original.

What remains unknown, and probably unascertainable, is the name of the book of love-poetry to which the Sonnet so clearly alludes. It might have been addressed by Marlowe to Shakespeare after reading the *VENUS* in MS. One would like to believe *that*; but it seems rather more likely that such a sonnet should come from Barnfield, who in 1598 wrote that the *VENUS* and the *LUCRECE*, "in fame's immortall Booke have plac't" Shakespeare's name. All that we can be reasonably sure of is that Sonnet 55 is not of Shakespeare's writing, that it is not a pæan to a patron, and that it *is* a poem *on* a poem.

Having thus seen (1) that the Sonnets thus far pretty certainly include non-Shakespearean work, (2) that they probably include Shakespearean pieces written on behalf of others, after the primary series had been written "by request," and (3) that the "internal" argument for the late dating of such an inferior Sonnet as No. 55 breaks down, we are so far still led to conclude that the collection probably proceeds as a whole from 1591-3 onwards, and that for a time, at least, the Southampton connection subsists. In Nos. 18 and 19, however, we pass from persuasion to simple "eternising" flattery in the conventional manner, the poet assuming that his Sonnet, being eternal, gives immortality to the unnamed recipient:

So long as men can breathe, as eyes can see,
So long lives *this*, and *this* gives life to thee.

Yet do thy worst, old Time : despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse live ever young.

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Sonnet 19 is certainly addressed to a male (l. 11); No. 18 not certainly so: it is only the effect of contiguity that gives the presumption. But No. 20 expressly and extravagantly celebrates the beauty of a male; then No. 21 sharply changes the note, as if in reaction from all such extravagance, to a profession that

I will not praise that purpose not to sell;

which reads curiously, not to say impossibly, after the other; and No. 22 strikes yet another note,

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou art of one date,

which definitely raises the question that we have felt to be evoked by No. 23, seen to be quite possibly a Sonnet written either *for* or by a man wooing a woman, and more probably the former. No. 24 *may* be in the same category; but No. 25, which purports to come from one of lowly state, definitely suggests self-expression. Then comes No. 26,

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy *merit* hath my *duty* strongly knit,

which on the common assumption ends that series, and which so strongly suggests the dedication to LUCRECE, with its parallelisms of phrase and sentiment. These first suggested to Nathan Drake that Southampton was the male recipient of the Sonnets; and only a concern to date everything late for the sake of the Herbert hypothesis can obscure the connection. "Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater," says the dedication; "meantime, as it is, it is bound to your lordship." There is no overt connection here with the previous Sonnets. The poet in No. 26 is evidently writing on his own account, as one indeed who is known to the recipient, but is respectfully soliciting his favour as patron. Here everything tells

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of a "personal" utterance: there is no empty "eternising," but the normal Elizabethan humility and customary flattery to the patron, who is deftly solicited for favour.

Till whatsoever star that guides my moving
Points on me graciously with fair aspect,
And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,
To show me worthy of thy sweet respect:
Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
Till then not show my head where thou may'st prove me.

This has by most critics been taken as an envoy to a series; but it may very well have been, as Massey¹ and Mrs. Stopes² have argued, sent to Southampton in 1592 with the MS. of the *VENUS*. The words: "puts apparel on my tattered loving" are quite tractable to the interpretation: "that is, by having it printed and bound." To Mr. Pooler, the style suggests a somewhat later date, but he does not go into detail. Surely the phrasing is for the most part unsophisticated, indeed rather unskilful than otherwise; and surely the echo in the last two lines of Daniel's rhyme, "prove me—love me," in *DELIA*, which belongs to 1592 (not 1594, as Dowden suggests), further warrants the 1592 date. On any view, though "this written embassy" (unlike "this powerful rime" in No. 55) might in this context conceivably mean either this single Sonnet or the (or a) series thus far written and now sent collected, it is much more likely that it is a dedicatory missive than that it is either an envoy to a series or, as some rearrangers make it, the first Sonnet of all, here misplaced; though it may well be the first really "personal" one.

How, then, are we to regard the enigmatic Sonnets between 17 and 26? Nos. 18 and 19 clearly cannot belong to this series if 26 ends it: they hold a much

¹ See above, p. 28.

² *Shakespeare's Environment*, p. 153.

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more intimate tone than that ventures on; and the same holds of 21; while 20 is wholly out of congruity, with its "master-mistress of my passion." Beeching thinks the "cadence" of the concluding line of 19, "My love shall in my verse ever live young," marks the end of the first Sonnet series; but that leaves the incongruity of 26 unaffected. The seventeen matrimonial Sonnets may readily be conceived as intended for presentation to the recipient by another hand or hands—say, for one, the mother's. No. 22, again, might be conceived as written *for the mother*, expressly speaking to her son in her own name; and 23, as aforesaid, for a youth (Southampton or another) to present to the woman he loves. But 18, 19, 20, and 21 cannot be thus disposed of. If they are "mouthpiece" Sonnets, we cannot divine for whom.

Are they all really Shakespeare's? No. 20, already called in question, with its double rhymes, its crude and flashy diction, and its poor rhythm, directly recalls Barnes by the line:

Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.

He has (PARTHENOPHIL, 83):

In looking on thy face, whose sight amazes
My sense;

and again (52):

His music all wild beasts did so amaze;

and yet again (92):

A tongue whose sweetness 'mazes all the muses;

and still again (104):

A world of graces which amaze
All young beholders.

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Now, this very *cliché*, echoed from Barnes or another, appears in the VENUS (634):

Sweet lips and crystal eyne
Whose full perfection all the world amazes.

That Shakespeare has so echoed Barnes's four-times-used tag is really a ground for inferring that it was not he who used it a sixth time in a Barnesian sonnet. For Barnes also has a line (Son. 2) about the difference "betwixt a Mistress' service and a Master "; and he has many allusions (27, 28, 62, 69, 84, etc.) to his "Passions," with a capital P, sometimes apparently in the sense of poems, which has been not unjustifiably claimed, by Massey and others, to be the sense of "my passion" in our No. 20, the word having been so specialised by Watson. Of all the sonneteers of the time, as we have noted, Barnes is most given to dissyllable rhymes; and in 1593 we find him including a dedicatory sonnet to Southampton among those appended to his volume of that year.

But our 21 is of quite another order, and is not even definitely applied to a male; which may also be said not only of 23 but of 24 and 25. Are these, then, possibly voluntary or competitive "exercises"? The first step towards a possible ground of answer to such questions is the study of the internal evidence for Shakespeare's early authorship.

CHAPTER IV

THE DATING OF THE STYLE

§ I.

ONE apparent warning against hasty dismissal of a Quarto Sonnet as unworthy of the poet is the literary spectacle of his first published poems. Dr. Theodor Eichhoff and Mr. H. T. S. Forrest, as we have seen, find the great majority of the Sonnets too poor to be Shakespeare's (though for Mr. Forrest some of the poorer may yet be "fine"). But one doubts whether Dr. Eichhoff, or anyone else save perhaps Mr. Forrest, will deny that, in mere point of thought and phrase,¹ there are a good many bad stanzas in the VENUS, and a good many more in the LUCRECE. Coleridge, taking refuge in rhetoric, declared² that "in Shakespeare's Poems, the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace." Descending to prose and common sense in another mood, he put the critical fact that the Sonnets, "like the Venus and Adonis and the Rape of Lucrece, are characterised by boundless fertility and laboured condensation of thought, with perfection of sweetness in rhythm and metre."³ Here we come to critical fact.

The VENUS is, biographically and æsthetically speaking, a pot-boiler; and the LUCRECE, a larger and poorer piece of work with a more respectable subject, is another, inspired chiefly by the success of the first.

¹ Never in rhythm or scansion. There Shakespeare is adult from the start. This becomes an important consideration when we come to the study of the technical aspects of the Sonnets.

² *Biographia Literaria*, ch. xv.

³ *Table Talk*, May 14, 1833.

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Having written a poem of 199 stanzas of six lines each, which was well received, he rapidly penned one of 265 stanzas of seven lines each, revealing afresh his tireless fertility and facility, and setting a "moral" success against one hardly so acclaimable. Being Shakespeare's, the two pieces have been printed a million times; but their "immortality" is that of *immortelles*. That he never produced anything more of the kind when he had reached economic security is the sufficient proof of his own estimate of such work. "I'll rhyme you so eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping-hours excepted," might have been said by him of his own narrative poems.

Coleridge's categories of creative power and intellectual energy, and his further ascription to the Poems of "a most profound, energetic and philosophical mind," possessing "all the conditions of the true poet,"¹ form an idle barrage of declamation. The practical truth is that the young poet possessed from the first a quite abnormal faculty of rhythmic word-production, of discursive imagery, of sententious thought, and of descriptive detail. In his true field of dramatic expression, these powers made him easily the first master alike of rhythmic beauty and of plangent feeling; and there the fantastic literary fashions of the period had but a small sway for harm over his genius even in his youth. In the Poems, he follows the fashions as a matter of course, seeking his market as he had need to do, hard put to it as he was when the theatres were closed. Success was to be attained by conventional artifice, and of all such devices he was master at will.

In his first poem he wrote, nevertheless, with a freshness of zest natural in the circumstances, producing enough of fluent portraiture and easy narrative, all on the decorative plane of art, to account for the description of it as "immortal" in his own day, and as "a

¹ *Lectures*, ed. Ashe, p. 223.

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beautiful poem " in ours, though it is really a poem without a soul, so to say.¹ Its ungodly goddess and its sexless youth who lectures her for her lechery belong to decorative art, though here the Greek simplicity of the old myth is overlaid by the realism engendered by the new drama. For in this idyll from the modern-antique Shakespeare spontaneously dramatises and modernises. But the hybrid product has the virtue of neither form, and certainly misses artistic "sincerity," apart from the realism. A more vital note was at that very time being sounded in Elizabethan narrative poetry by Marlowe in his unfinished *HERO AND LEANDER*.

And the *LUCRECE* is on the same plane, being wrought on the same motive, with but a change to the elegiac key and a more resolute multiplication of the kinds of euphuistic effect which had made the other a popular success, with a certain increase of weight of sententious reflection. Here, indeed, there is no freshness, but there is an unlimited, an amazing facility in the output of every kind of modish stroke of phrase and diction, image and metaphor, axiom and generalisation, conceit and alliteration, always easily rhymed and perfectly scanned, but as regards emotional matter, always externally and never intensively realised. The notion, first put in currency, apparently, by Cole-

¹ There was probably an element of reaction against Coleridge in Hazlitt's verdict on the Poems, but it is worth remembering: "The two poems of Venus and Adonis and of Tarquin and Lucrece appear to us like a couple of ice-houses. They are about as hard, as glittering, and as cold" (*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. 1869, p. 242). Hazlitt's general theory of Shakespeare (*Id.*, p. 243) is that "It was only in representing others that he became himself. . . . In expressing the thoughts of others, he seems inspired; in expressing his own, he was a mechanic." This is an amazing generalisation in view of the Sonnets. As to these, however, Hazlitt was avowedly non-plussed: "Of the Sonnets we do not well know what to say." He had apparently read them only in one of the reprints of the Benson edition.

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ridge,¹ that these poems had been written at Stratford, is utterly untenable. They were written at need and for need. The first is demonstrably modelled, as to manner, on Lodge's *SCILLA'S METAMORPHOSIS* (1589), and the second on Daniel's *COMPLAINT OF ROSAMOND* (1592). They are, in fact, a ready writer's works of merchandise; and as such they availed. Chapman scornfully commented on poets who "fame's loose feathers beautify," and produced his *IVID'S BANQUET* to show how erotic poetry should be done; but the young rhymers, who so spontaneously knew his poetry-reading world, could tranquilly point to a popular success which Chapman never compassed, and which, in that connection, was all he wanted. He had taken the length of his public's foot as rhymers some time before he did it as dramatist, where his very genius at first stood in his way.

As to the æsthetic objectionableness of most of the then acceptable art of the *LUCRECE* there is now, probably, little dispute. "I consider it," Mr. Morton Luce firmly declares, "far inferior to the *VENUS*, which has faults, perhaps many of them, but nothing quite like this" (quoting stanza 140, ll. 974-80). We are all with him (despite Elze's insistence on the "moral progress" exhibited in the second poem) save perhaps as to the "far inferior." The *LUCRECE* is in its own way a prodigy of decorative art, by the most facile of all artists. It is in fact the most bewilderingly exuberant accumulation of liquid euphuistic verbalism in the age in which euphuism was reckoned the last word of literary beauty.

§ 2.

But the point now to be kept in view, as to both poems, is their contemporaneity with the earlier

¹ "There can be little doubt that they had remained by him in manuscript many years" (*Lectures*, p. 245).

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Sonnets. If the student will not admit that the *VENUS* actually reproduces, without fitness even on its own plane, certain fit themes of the matrimonial Sonnets, he at least cannot dispute that one set of verses echoes the other. The parallel passages have been familiar since Malone. The two stanzas of *V. AND A.*, 127-8 (ll. 757-68), beginning,

What is thy body but a swallowing grave,

and ending,

But gold that's put to use more gold begets,

are but condensations of Sonnets 1 and 2; and stanzas 27-9 (ll. 157-74) are variations on the same theme. This is not disputed; and we have seen that the only justifiable inference is that the Sonnets came first. But as this dates them 1592 at latest, and as the ordinary Southampton argument claims some date in or near 1593, the entire Pembroke camp, including those who incline to it without enlisting, seek reasons for refusing any such inference. My lamented friend William Archer, arguing in 1898 that "there is no evidence to place even the earliest of the Sonnets before 1597," wrote that the parallelism between the *VENUS* and the matrimonial Sonnets "does not even establish the faintest presumption" of a date about 1593. "Similar situations beget similar expressions, and Shakespeare urging a fair youth to marry would naturally repeat, at whatever distance of time, some of the arguments by which his *Venus* had sought to overcome the obstinate coldness of the 'flint-hearted boy.' On the other hand, if the friends of a handsome and 'self-willed' youth were anxious to see him settled in life, and thought that literary exhortation might further that end, they would naturally apply to the poet who had become famous in virtue of the honeyed eloquence he had lent to the Goddess of Desire." As if the difficulty with

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Herbert would ever have been to incite him to desire; and as if *that* were the objective of an invitation to a young man of easy virtue to marry.

Just before putting the argument that "similar situations beget similar expressions," Archer had been reciting and endorsing Tyler's argument to the effect that Sonnet 55 *must* have been suggested by Meres's quotations from Horace and Ovid in 1598. We have seen that that inference is vitiated by the fact that the Sonnet makes Ovidian borrowings *not* indicated by Meres, and that on the principles put forward Meres must be held to have proceeded on the Sonnet, not the other way about. Archer sums up on that issue (knowing nothing of the details latterly urged by Mr. Acheson) that "If this Sonnet did not grow out of these pages of Meres—if it was written before, or in ignorance of, the passage in *PALLADIS TAMIA*—then it is clear that some tricky demon must have taken a malicious pleasure in accumulating coincidences with the set purpose of leading us astray." Quite so; but why not take that attitude towards the echoes between the early Sonnets and the *VENUS*? If coincidences are to be let pass so easily in one case, why not in the other? Why should coincidence in the use of hackneyed classic quotations establish even "the faintest presumption" of a literary connection in the accepted case if reduplication of matter is actually to exclude elsewhere a presumption of nearness in date?

All the while, as we have seen, the Pembroke case is at *this* point as unplausible as the Southampton case is plausible. There are no such grounds in the former for inferring a commission to write the persuasive Sonnets as there are in the latter. Pembroke was not the sole prop of his house. On the other hand, the actual dedications to Southampton form an obviously reasonable ground for the surmise that it was to him, who *was* desired by his mother to marry

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advantageously, that the matrimonial Sonnets were addressed. The only obstacle is the erroneous assumption that Pembroke was "*Mr. W. H.*," which we know he was not, and that Southampton is on that score excluded. But we have seen that the old "*W. H.*" problem is capable of restatement; and, further, that the old assumption of the Shakespearean authorship of all the Sonnets is open to decisive challenge.

What Archer would have said as to the argument now advanced for the priority of the early Sonnets to the *VENUS* I cannot guess. In all things, he was one of the most honest of men; and though he was averse from any radical revision of the Canon he would not, I think, have denied the possibility that some of the Sonnets are from alien pens, or the corollary that some of his arguments against early dating are thus affected. But we may fitly shift the stress of the argument on those issues to the latest editor, Professor Tucker, who, with strong leanings to the theory that Pembroke was "*Mr. W. H.*," though he admits it to be indemonstrable, pronounces it the most probable, and repeats Archer's argument as to the "inevitable" repetition by Shakespeare in 1598, for persuasive purposes, of an argument used by the goddess in the *VENUS*, which we have seen to be preposterous as an original idea in that connection.

§ 3.

In the use of the "inevitable" argument, it should be admitted, Professor Tucker has the important support of Mr. Pooler, who argues, concerning the *LUCRECE* dedication and the 26th Sonnet, that "The resemblance ceases to be significant when we consider that it is *natural* that two dedications by the same writer should be alike." This must mean "two dedications to different men," and one really must negate such a proposition. A poet who penned *such* a dedication as that to the *LUCRECE*, professing a complete literary

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and personal devotion, would surely not, within a few years, profess exactly the same devotion, in almost the same words, to *another* patron. Even if we put an impossible interval of four years between the utterances, impossibly dating the 26th Sonnet 1598, there is nothing "natural" about supposing them meant for different addressees. Had not Shakespeare, of all men, the wit to save appearances by varying his formula when professing lifelong devotion to two different patrons?

Professor Tucker is no more persuasive. His argumentation proceeds, as he says concerning one of the contrary pleas, "only under stress of the adverse theory." After all the discussion he actually repeats Minto's plea that "Lord Buckhurst is still 'Mr. Sackville' in ENGLAND'S PARNASSUS. So Lord Pembroke is still 'William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.'" But Herbert had *never* been "Mr." Herbert, any more than the late Marquis of Salisbury was ever "Mr. Cecil"; whereas Lord Buckhurst had won his literary fame as "Mr. Sackville," and might as naturally be so named when a peer as was Disraeli after he became Lord Beaconsfield. A case so argued is not improved by the pleas urged by Professor Tucker against the early dating of the matrimonial Sonnets. Admitting that "the argument is one of considerable strength," he puts the odd objection (p. xxii): "In the first place it cannot be taken for granted that a poet who has *once* employed a figure or an expression will *never* return to that figure or expression." Who ever took such a thing for granted? The very proposition argued *against* by the Professor is that Shakespeare *did* return in the Poems and the early Plays to phrases and notions which he had used in the Sonnets, or *vice versa*.

The real issue is, Do the Sonnet parallels suggest a return *in or after* 1598, to the phraseology and ideas

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of the Poems and the early Plays? That issue is certainly complicated by the fact that Sonnet-echoes occur in *some* plays which cannot *as they stand* be dated early, as *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*. But Professor Tucker forces the issue by arguing on the one hand (p. xxiv) that "While we are conscious of having *recently* given a certain form of expression to a certain notion, we are perhaps more likely to avoid it than to repeat it" (which ostensibly amounts to suggesting that in his mature or middle period Shakespeare was likelier to echo work of 1592 or 1593 than he would be in, say, 1595-6); and on the other hand, as regards the "increase" theme in the opening Sonnets and the *VENUS*, that "the *subjects* are in certain ways so closely akin that the same notions *inevitably* suggest themselves, and to a large extent *similar words* would follow." Now, as has been argued above, the main "subject" in the *VENUS* is so essentially different from that of the matrimonial Sonnets that the "increase" plea could not possibly have first suggested itself there, and must therefore be reckoned a factitious addition, adopted to eke out a poem that had to be swelled to book size.

Professor Tucker, however, assumes to turn such an argument against itself by referring to the admitted echoes from *EDWARD III*—the "lilies that fester" line in Sonnet 94 and the "scarlet ornaments" of Sonnet 142. Now, the priority, in that case, of the play can be reasonably proved in two ways. The passage in Sonnet 142,

Those *lips* of thine
That have profaned their scarlet ornaments,

is a highly infelicitous use of the play phrase, which runs:

His *cheeks* put on their scarlet ornaments.

The "cheeks" form *must* have preceded the "lips"

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form, which no man could have struck out as an original idea. The Sonnet proceeds,

And *sealed* false bonds of love as oft as mine,

which makes matters even worse by introducing sealing-wax, as had been badly enough done in the *VENUS* (516). And if this Sonnet be taken as Shakespeare's, we must confess that it shows him capable of quite poor retrospective workmanship at a time that must be put later than that of the matrimonial Sonnets. On that view, we could not well argue that the Sonnets are safely to be dated in respect at once of style, substance, and execution. My own inference, reached in this inquiry without any presupposition, is that this ill-written Sonnet is really not Shakespeare's. It is not only prosaic in diction from the second line onwards, and wretchedly bad in respect of the "lips" trope, but it contains the only sample in the Sonnets of the "split infinitive" ("to pitied be"), as *JULIUS CÆSAR*, in a non-Shakespearean passage, contains the only example in the Plays.¹ But as this line of argument may be open to the primary suspicion of being framed to save Shakespeare's credit, let it be at this stage waived, and let us return to the simple question of the dating of the Sonnets in respect of early echoes.

The "lilies that feſter" line in Sonnet 94, on our view, must be dated, like the "scarlet ornaments" line in 142, *after* the play, though that dating gives a *prima facie* opening for the Pembroke theory. But it is really quite compatible with an early dating of either Sonnet. Not by guesswork, but on a basis of close collation of texts, *EDWARD III* is shown² to be a play planned and in large part written by Marlowe, but rewritten as to the Countess scenes by Greene, to

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part I, pp. 147-8.

² See *An Introduction to the Study of the Shakespeare Canon*, per Index.

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whom, in particular, can be traced both the "scarlet ornaments, and the "lilies that feſter." And as Greene died in 1592, the play was preſumably on the boards, as recaſt by him, in that year, if not before. Metrically, it ranks among his lateſt work. Shakeſpeare, then, could be quoting the "lilies" line in that year or the next, or later, without having had anything to do with the writing of the play. Profeſſor Tucker's remark that he "probably had a hand" in it muſt be noted as a ſurprising acceptance, by a profeſſedly cautious critic, of a theory never reaſonably juſtified, and this in diſregard of contrary evidence.

For there is, finally, a literary clue which definitely proves Shakeſpeare to have known EDWARD III as an acted play years before it was printed. In the LUCRECE we have the lines (1004-5):

The mightier man, the mightier is the thing
That makes him honour'd or begets his hate.

This is an obvious echo of the lines in EDWARD III (II, 434-5)—

The greater man, the greater is the thing,
Be it good or bad, that he ſhall undertake

—which, pointing to the

Magis peccatum, thus I rede,
If he be high that doth the deed,

in the "Ode" in PHILOMELA (1592), indicate Greene as their author. For the reſt, I would invite the ſtudent to ask himſelf whether a poet, after writing the paſſable line,

His cheeks put on their ſcarlet ornaments,

could pen the other about lips profaning theirs. The very belief that Shakeſpeare wrote Sonnet 142 ſhould bar the ſurmiſe that he could preſviously have written the play line. That he did ſo I do not believe; but

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that he wrote the "lips" line is incredible in another way. It *must* be later than the play line; but it can have been written by somebody else than Shakespeare.

§ 4.

Dismissing the EDWARD III echoes as simply quotations compatible with the early dating of the Sonnets involved, whether or not they be taken as Shakespeare's, we return to the main argument from close parallels between the Sonnets and the Poems and early Plays. Professor Tucker himself notes a number. We have "quiet closure of my breast" in V. AND A., 782, and "gentle closure of my breast" in Sonnet 48; the VENUS lines 173-4—

And so in spite of death thou dost survive,
In that thy likeness still is left alive

—are closely paralleled at the ends of Sonnets 6 and 10;
as is the VENUS line 157,

Is thine own heart to thine own face affected ?

in Sonnet 1:

But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes ;

and, again, the VENUS line 724:

Rich preys make true men thieves ;

in Sonnet 48:

For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

But all this, we may be told, is a kind of phrasing which the poet would "inevitably" repeat five or more years later, were he then persuading Herbert to marry. What, then, of the parallels in LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST ? There we have slight but suggestive verbal echoes such as that of iv, iii, 328:

To things of sale a seller's praise belongs,

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and the line in Sonnet 21:

I will not praise that purpose not to sell;

and, again (L. L. L. iv, iii, 299):

From woman's eyes this doctrine I derive;

and the line in Sonnet 14:

But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive.

There can hardly be any argument here of "inevitable repetition" in "similar circumstances": we have ostensible echoes by the poet of lines he has already used, even as we may have echoes in the Sonnets from other men's plays or poetry—one of the commonest features of Elizabethan verse. But whether or not, for instance, Shakespeare wrote the lines in ROMEO (I, i, 220 *seq.*; I, v, 47-8; II, v, 9) which are echoed in Sonnets 1, 7, 11, 14, and 27, these parallels all hint of nearness in time, which is the essential thing. Sonnet 48 may be later than the VENUS, and the line about "rich preys" sounds proverbial; but the "gentle closure" of the Sonnet, read as coming from a woman, suggests a prior, as it is a more appropriate, use. On any view, we are still in the same style-period.

So with the parallels in the early plays: Sonnet 23 points to KING JOHN (III, i, 83):

The glorious sun

Stays in his course and plays the alchemist,
Turning with splendour of his precious eye
The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold;

Sonnet 33 to I Henry IV, I, ii, 220:

The sun

Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the sun;

and Sonnet 52, with its line,

Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,

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to the same play, III, ii, 58-9:

My state,
Seldom but sumptuous, showed like a feast
And won by rareness such solemnity.

As we have seen, it is claimed by Beeching, as by others, that I HENRY IV must be dated 1597 or 1598. But even that dating of the play will not avail for the Pembroke theory; and in point of fact the argument from metrics brings both JOHN and I HENRY IV some years earlier. Even if we date the MERCHANT *en bloc* 1598, the lines there (III, ii, 92) about the "golden locks" known "to be the dowry of a second head" would not involve dating Sonnet 68 still later. But strict bibliographical study, as that of Dr. Dover Wilson in the new Cambridge edition of Shakespeare, shows that there were "early" forms of the MERCHANT and MUCH ADO, as a study of the German ROMEO AND JULIET confirms the old inference that there was a pre-Shakespearean form of that play.¹

And when we come to the few parallels between the Sonnets and the "late" Plays, the inference as to the early dating of the matrimonial Sonnets and many more is confirmed in a striking fashion; for there it is "late" Sonnets that are involved. An exception to this has indeed been claimed in respect of Sonnet 54, of which lines 5 and 8—

The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye. . . .
When summer's breath their masked buds *discloses*—

are paralleled in HAMLET, I, iii, 39-40:

The canker galls the infants of the spring,
Too oft before their buttons be *disclosed*.

Upon that, Beeching, noting further the echo of "masked" and "unmask," argues that the Sonnet may have been written *about the same time as the play*, which

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part III.

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he dates shortly before 1602; and Professor Tucker, without endorsing the inference, cites the main parallel. Here there is no argument as to the unlikeliness of the same phrase being used twice in the same period, and no comment as to the "inevitable" use of the same ideas and language in similar circumstances. Those pleas would seem to function only when it is a matter of denying an early date to a Sonnet. But there is really no solidity in the inference that Shakespeare began to work on HAMLET only about 1600-1. That he then proceeded to a large revision is likely enough; but that he had not done *some* work on it years before is highly unlikely. In the very scene cited, as in others of the first Act, the style and versification are much more suggestive of 1596 than of 1602; though, for that matter, Sonnet 54 is very dubiously Shakespearean, with its feeble diction and its halting syntax.¹

In the case of other "late" parallels there is no difficulty. In Sonnet 116 we have:

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds ;

in LEAR, I, i, 241-3:

Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stand
Aloof from the present point.

The correspondence is not close: but in any case Sonnet 116 would by everybody be dated at least some years after the opening thirty. It is as distinctly

¹ Professor Tucker proposes to cure the asyndeton of lines 10-11 by reading "unrespected-fade" as a compound adjective, as if such an abortion were not much worse than an asyndeton. That, however, is certainly also un-Shakespearean; and the fact that the sentiment about the blessedness of roses in being distilled is found twice elsewhere in Shakespeare (Son. 5 and *M.N.D.*) ought not to convince us that he gave it here a third run, in the feeblest kind of phrasing. Sonnet 5, as it happens, is a suspiciously feeble Sonnet also.

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mature as they are immature. And so, when in Sonnet 107 we find the lines,

The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured. . . .
And peace proclaims olives of endless age,

we again comment that that is certainly a late Sonnet, and that it is not surprising to find in ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA the slight echoes (III, xiii, 153; IV, vi, 7):

Alack, our terrene moon is now eclipsed ;

Prove this a prosperous day, the three-nooked world
Shall bear the olive freely.

And just as the Sonnets visibly late in style reach towards the period of the Plays that are certainly late as they stand, we are entitled to infer that the many echoes of early Plays and Poems in the first groups of Sonnets argue the earliness of these. The inference would never have been disputed save "under the stress of the adverse theory" that the matrimonial Sonnets were addressed to Herbert. It is certainly intelligible that such allusions to the speaker's age as we find in Sonnets 72 and 73 should set up an inference of a date later than 1598; but when we remember that on the Pembroke theory the infatuated Sonnets of PART II are also to be so dated, we have reason, not to suppose the poet conscious of superannuation in his own person, but to infer that he is writing missives for an older person to present—this where, as in 73, his hand is clearly revealed. In 62 the solution *may* be difference of authorship. The two named are certainly relatively late in style and complexity of feeling; but even they need not on that score be dated so late as 1600. If they are to be taken as personal, they will have to be placed near 1609.

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§ 5.

There remains to be noted, apart from the grounds furnished by echoes of phrase and idea for dating the earlier Sonnets in the period of the Poems, the no less striking evidence of the parallelism in manner between the Sonnets in question and the rhymed verse in one of the earliest Plays. Whether or not we recognise in the COMEDY OF ERRORS a play drafted and mainly written by Marlowe (probably on the basis of an earlier, written in "fourteener" verse), we are critically compelled by the marked parallelisms between it and ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM to date it not later than 1591-2.¹ The "disintegrator," further, is bound to agree with the traditionist to the extent of assigning portions of the work to Shakespeare; and of those portions one is the rhyming dialogue in Act III, Scene ii, long ago cited by Charles Bathurst in this connection. There we have, independently of all parallels of phrase, the most convincing likeness between the tune, the movement, the rhythm, and that of the earlier Sonnets. For instance:

If you did wed my sister for her wealth,
Then, for her wealth's sake, use her with more kindness :
Or, if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth ;
Muffle your false love with some show of blindness :
Let not my sister read it in your eye ;
Be not thy tongue thy own shame's orator ;
Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty,
Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger ;
Bear a fair presence though your heart be tainted ;
Teach sin the carriage of a holy saint ;
Be secret false : what need she be acquainted ?
What simple thief brags of his own attain't ?

We have here the very voice, the very pulsation, of the early Sonnets, with the same easy ringing of the

¹ See *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part II, pp. 146-9.

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changes on all the aspects of a thought. The identity of source is, indeed, the more obvious because of the identity of the rhymed quatrain form, which in a measure determines the phrasing. But who will seriously pretend that the ideation of the first fifty of the genuine Sonnets is any "later" than of those rhymed speeches in the ERRORS? There too, even as in the LUCRECE, we get the epigrammatic touch:

'Tis holy sport to be a little vain,
When the sweet breath of flattery conquers strife.

The advocate of dates for the Sonnets beginning at 1598 must, if he will face his problem, resort to the device of supposing a late redaction of the ERRORS, in the teeth of the unanimous assent to the verdict that just such rhyming in genuine Shakespearean work is a specific mark of earliness. We may reasonably wait for the event before supposing that any competent scholar will thus apply the tactic of Mr. Harris to the end of postdating by seven or more years the quatrains of the early COMEDY. It might, indeed, conceivably be argued that the rhythm of such a Sonnet as the 90th, which cannot be one of the earliest, is the same as theirs at its best. But we have just that winging rhythm in the rhymed dialogue of the early play; and the sound conclusion is that Sonnet 90 is probably no later than 1596, if so late. The quatrains of the ERRORS, on the other hand, belong to 1591-2; and the poet who wrote them could have penned the earlier Sonnets at that very time.

§ 6.

As against all these grounds for dating the bulk of the Sonnets before 1598, and many of them six or seven years before, we have the definite pronouncements of Professor Mackail to the contrary. It is

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after citing, in his lecture on the Sonnets, the "scarlet ornaments" passage from Sonnet 142, with the implication that Shakespeare might phrase thus badly in his middle period, that he writes (p. 187: here coinciding with Craig): "So far, the natural conclusion to be drawn would be that the Sonnets were *in the main* composed at intervals over a space of some five years, 1598-1603." That is to say, either there is a long gap between the first six-and-twenty or so and the rest, or even the opening series of matrimonial Sonnets is to be dated not earlier than 1598. For any such inference, one can see no clear grounds in the previous pages of the lecture, where the only clue is the remark that EDWARD III was "first *printed* in 1596"—a datum which, as we have seen, in no way excludes either the evidence or the high probability that Shakespeare knew the play *as acted*. As has been argued in a previous section, Sonnet 142 is probably not Shakespeare's at all, and Sonnet 94 may be in the same case. But even if we waive the question of authenticity, there is no ground for supposing a late date. According to Fleay,¹ the play actually passed into the hands of Shakespeare's company in 1594: and he may very well have played the part of Lodwike, in whose opening speech we have the "scarlet ornaments." We have seen, too, that he echoes it in the LUCRECE.²

Again (p. 191), Mr. Mackail writes that "in the large majority of the Sonnets, the power of thought, the charged fulness of language, the mastery of compressed and allusive style, are qualities not of the Shakespeare of VENUS AND ADONIS or LUCRECE, not of the Shakespeare of the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM,

¹ *Biog. Chron.*, ii, 62.

² I admit that there is an opening here for an argument that Shakespeare put some matter in EDWARD III. On that head I can but refer the student to my *Introduction to the Study of the Shakespeare Canon*, for the proof that the Countess scenes are rewritten by Greene.

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not even of the Shakespeare of *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* after its revision in 1597: they are those of the Shakespeare who has fully mastered his art in the great comedies, who has deepened his hold on life and the human soul to the potency of the great tragedies; they are those more particularly of the Shakespeare who is face to face with the whole vexing sorrow of the world, the Shakespeare who was writing or was preparing to write *HAMLET* and *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*."

Once more, it were to be wished that such a proposition were particularised. Set against these general claims the concrete fact of the "sonnet" qualities of the quatrain dialogue in the *ERRORS*, and the thesis is at once countered. Analysis brings us to the same obstacle. Say that a hundred Sonnets constitute the "large majority," where do they begin? Surely not in the first thirty-two do we find the qualities of style and thought specified, save in a sententious fashion that can be paralleled many times over in the *LUCECE*.¹ And is 33, with its limpid flow, its lyrism, and its unstrained diction, at all suggestive of the "compressed and allusive style" that emerges in parts of *HAMLET*? Surely it is not; and the abiding difficulty is to show where in the Sonnets such a change sets in. Strictly speaking, the very form and technique of the sonnet resisted such a development, which was so natural in blank verse; but as regards the deepening of thought which is as naturally to be looked for in the Sonnets as in the Plays, when the note of sorrow and frustration has once been sounded, as it is in Sonnets 33, 34, and 40, it is impossible to say that there is at first any more involution than in the opening lines of the *ERRORS*, or the speech of Ægeon in the last Act, or the quatrains in the third. In 44 and 45, indeed, there is some measure of new "compression," but

¹ *E.g.*, stt. 6, 7, 10, 13, 19, 22, 31, etc. A packed sententiousness of phrase, in fact, pervades the entire poem.

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without any corresponding sense of mastery; and again in 53, which, however, seems to call for an earlier place if it is to be accounted genuine. But where, up to 74, can it be argued that there is any sign of a new "compression" markedly and beneficially affecting the general style? Mr. Mackail himself dwells on No. 76, with its avowal that the poet "keeps invention in a noted weed."

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same—

all this declares on the poet's part an entire unconsciousness of any evolution in his verse technique; and the style here is in fact not "compressed" at all. Mr. Mackail will have it that we find the explanation by supposing Shakespeare to have *begun* sonneting after the fashion had gone out. But what a priori likelihood is there of that? It is an obvious improbability that the man who wrote hundreds of stanzas in 1592-3, and sonnets and quatrains in early Plays, would shun private sonneting till 1598; and the surmise must have been suggested less by any concrete evidence than by a presupposition.

The truth is that an apparent *change* of style—as in No. 20; or again in 87 and 88, with their marked iambic movement; in 43-6; and in the recurrence in 87 to the dissyllable rhyming of No. 20—appears at times to be accompanied rather by a slighter than a deeper strain of thinking, and a smaller poetic inspiration. Sonnet 73, with its finer rhythm, reverts to the previous lyrical note and the old liquid sweetness, despite the deepened thought and feeling. We can all agree, probably, that in 107—where Mr. Mackail, like so many others, finds the reference to the death

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of Elizabeth and the peaceful succession of James "unmistakable"—we have the pregnant thought and the large diction of the great middle period; and that some of the following Sonnets also have a ripened diction; but how many of that quality can be cited to make good the claim of a "large majority" of Sonnets dateable after 1598? And what evidence is there in the "Dark Lady" Sonnets of a deepening of thought as distinct from feeling?

On the point of style quality, as on the point of the internal signs of contemporaneity with the plays before HAMLET, the real evidence, I venture to repeat, is all in favour of the earlier dating not only for most of the first 126 but for most of the Sonnets which follow them. And, finally, the *purport* of such a Sonnet as 110, thoroughly Shakespearean to my thinking, and marked by as deep a strain of thought and feeling as any, therefore on that score arguably late—the *purport* here, I would submit (on what is, indeed, a debated interpretation) is more easily reconcilable with a date about 1596–7 than with one after 1598. As was argued in a previous chapter (p. 44), it points to the period in which Shakespeare had still to establish his position as master-poet to his company; and it consists ill with his position after 1598, when he was not only in funds, and making investments in Stratford property, but had scored a series of dramatic successes and had, with his company, a good standing at court. And all that consists no less ill with the notion that he would in 1598 undertake the task of writing a series of Sonnets to persuade the Lord Herbert to marry. Least of all does it consist with his then proclaiming vassalage to Herbert, and humbly hoping to be able to "put apparel on his tattered loving."

It is obviously not impossible that Shakespeare may have had some connection with the young Herbert, and may even have shared with him in a scandalous

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episode in which Mary Fitton was concerned; though the evidence for that is utterly unsatisfying, even to such a friend of the Pembroke theory as Professor Tucker. But there is no plausibility whatever in the hypothesis that the prosperous player and dramatist of 1598 and 1599 would crave Pembroke's patronage with the diffident humility that would be so natural in the beginner of 1591-2. All that aspect of the Pembroke-Fitton theory is irreconcilable with the known biographical facts. Its framers and adherents seem never to have considered it in half its relations. Not that this slackness is confined to the Pembroke camp. We shall find that the common habit of taking all the first 126 Sonnets as addressed to one man, and that man Southampton, leads to just as many contradictory positions. But before contemplating these and seeking a way out, it is expedient to get the Pembroke presupposition out of the way.

§ 7.

The incoherence of the Pembroke theory, as regards not only the early Sonnets but those addressed to or penned upon the Dark Lady, becomes finally overwhelming for the critical sense when we note the exposition of it in the egregious work of Mr. Frank Harris. In Mr. Harris's view, "the story of [Shakespeare's] idolatrous passion for Mary Fitton is the story of his life"; and the "idolatrous" character of the passion is supposed to be made clear by the fact that "nearly every sonnet of the twenty-six devoted to his mistress contains some accusation against her."¹ Further, the Dark Lady is, among others, the Rosaline of ROMEO AND JULIET,² on whom Romeo, who is "an incarnation of Shakespeare,"³ instantly and absolutely turns his back when he sees Juliet. ROMEO

¹ *The Man Shakespeare*, p. 217.

² *Id.*, p. 220. ³ *Id.*, p. 218.

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AND JULIET, then, was written by Shakespeare after his friendship with Herbert had reached the stage at which Herbert is supposed to have played him false. Accordingly Mr. Harris proposes to salve his chronology by claiming that "in its present form" *ROMEO AND JULIET* "must be taken to date from 1597." But Herbert came to London only in 1598; and neither Tyler nor any other of his adherents has pretended that Shakespeare can have met him before that year. The case is thus quashed, once for all.

Tyler, it may of course be replied, was not responsible for the theories of Mr. Harris. When, then, Mr. Harris further identifies Shakespeare with Biron, and Mary Fitton with the Rosaline of *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*, and announces that "even at Christmas, 1597, Shakespeare's passion [for Mary Fitton] has reached the height of a sex-duel," the Pembroke theory is not destroyed by his folly in antedating the Herbert connection as formulated by Tyler. Mr. Harris in point of fact sets out, as regards the Sonnets, by saying that Tyler "was the first person to *prove* that the time they cover extends roughly *from* 1598 to 1601."¹ And even at that, we are asked to regard the Herbert connection as running its length up to Sonnet 144 in less than a year.² The reversion to 1597 is indeed typical of the peculiar chicanery of the theory which, to the admiration of a bevy of English critics, presented Shakespeare as enslaved throughout life by a besotted "sensuality." But Mr. Harris's endorsement of Tyler, whom he declared to have read the Sonnets "with extraordinary understanding," was one of the main props of the Pembroke theory for the critics who acclaimed him; and the recognition of the utter worthlessness of that support may serve to make newer

¹ *The Man Shakespeare*, p. 205.

² *The Passionate Pilgrim*, which contains Sonnets 138 and 144, was published in 1599.

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students alive to the need for coherent thinking on all aspects of Shakespeare interpretation. As regards the construction, authorship, and chronology of the Plays, Mr. Harris merely exploited the unexamined canonical tradition, which on the one hand ascribes to the young poet the writing of whole plays before 1593, in defiance of the declaration in the dedication of the *VENUS*, and on the other hand, postdates for him plays containing matter that is demonstrably pre-Shakespearean.

CHAPTER V

PROBLEMS OF DESTINATION

§ 1. *A Typical Sonnet Debate*

(Sonnets 109-119.)

WHEN the younger Boswell, in the Variorum edition of 1821, repelled as unwarrantable the inference that in Sonnets 110 and 111 Shakespeare expressed a bitter sense of the humiliations of the actor's calling, he established a debate which has never since long died down, and is latterly active. He was presumably answering, though he does not name, Charles Lamb, who in his great essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare' (1810), citing both Sonnets in indignant repudiation of the thought that Garrick was a "kindred mind" with the dramatist, treats them as obviously referring to "his profession as a player."

For a long period, though Halliwell-Phillipps and presumably others held to Boswell's standpoint, Lamb's view seems to have been general. C. A. Brown took it for granted (p. 38) that that was the obvious meaning of the two Sonnets in question. Professor Masson, in his Edinburgh University lectures, from 1865 onwards, taught¹ that the opening lines of 110 "can mean only that he has gone over the country as a stage-player, performing all kinds of parts," and that the line, "Made old offences of affections new," meant that the poet had put parts of his own recent experience into plays "planted in the past and enacted by imaginary persons." For Dowden, such was still the "common" view in 1880, as it was for Fleay in 1891

¹ *Shakespeare Personally*, 1914, p. 204.

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and for Shindler in 1892. It seems to have been Massey who gave a new life to the other opinion by arguing that the poet could not have put to his patron a bitter view of his stage life even if he had held one, and that accordingly the 110th Sonnet must be read as a dramatic utterance by the poet *for* Southampton, making confession to Elizabeth Vernon of having "made himself a motley to the view." It did not occur to Massey or to his critics that the Sonnet might have been addressed by Shakespeare to someone else than the patron. Halliwell-Phillipps, as we have seen, argued on less startling lines, though to no better purpose.

That both Sonnets pointed to the humiliations of the player-poet in his years of apprenticeship was, I think, my own spontaneous view at first reading, effectively enforced by Lamb; and after Tyler and Wyndham had emphatically acquiesced in Lamb's interpretation it was an interesting experience to find it flatly rejected by Beeching and Dr. Bradley. There is something to be said for their view; but both are summary in judgment. "There is *no* reference to the poet's profession of player," says the Dean. "The sonnet gives the confession of a favourite of society." And for Dr. Bradley this view seems "unquestionably right. . . . This applies, I think," he goes on, "to the whole group of sonnets (it begins with 107) in which the poet excuses his neglect of his friend, though there are *also* references to his profession and its effect."¹

Dictum for dictum, we might pit against Beeching's that of Wyndham: "To say that [Shakespeare] could never have slighted his art as an actor, . . . and then to seek for far-fetched and fantastic interpretations,² is to evince an ignorance, not only of the obloquy to which actors were then exposed, and of the degrada-

¹ *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 1909, p. 322 note.

² The reference is probably to Massey and Halliwell-Phillipps.

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tions they had to bear, but also of human nature as we know it even in heroes.”¹ And for Tyler, who took the same view, the matter is one “on which the Sonnets leave no room for doubt.” Craig, editing the Sonnets near the end of his life, was put in doubt by Beeching, but observes that “no other explanation seems to be of much use.” Balancing verdicts yet again, we find Massey citing the line of John Davies (written in condolence with Shakespeare and Burbage), “The stage doth stain pure gentle blood,” only to argue that Shakespeare was *not* of gentle blood, and therefore *not* stained; while Elze cites the same line to prove the rightness of the view that the Sonnets expressed Shakespeare’s recoil at one period from his stage life.

If we are to get beyond this deadlock of asseveration, it can only be by analysis of the negative position, and by first asking whether the backers of Beeching quite realise what he is affirming. He makes Shakespeare confess to having “made himself a motley to the view” as a *society favourite*—that is, to have wilfully played the buffoon under no compulsion; and this (on Beeching’s view of the dates) about or after the time when, having bought New Place, he was a man of property. It will perhaps be at least granted that this interpretation puts the poet in a considerably more unfavourable light than that of the other. “Made myself a motley to the view” is here made a confession of ignoble behaviour, where the Lamb interpretation leaves the poet with a stronger hold than ever on our sympathy. Under what textual stress is it claimed that this denigration is to be inflicted?

Professor Tucker argues that “there is *nothing* in the context [of ‘a motley’] to suggest a reference to his profession as actor. An actor does not ‘gore his own thoughts’ or make ‘old offences of affections new.’ The theme is simply that of his *lapses and*

¹ *Poems*, as cited, p. cxiv.

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aberrations (cf. 109, 111, 112) in company of *the baser sort*." Where, then, does Professor Tucker find in this sonnet any avowal of having frequented company of the baser sort? There is no such avowal. And where did Beeching find a confession of having been "a society favourite"? He was presumably thinking of the line,

That I have frequent been with unknown minds,

in Sonnet 117; but that does not bear him out, and still less does it bear out Professor Tucker. "Unknown minds"¹ does not suggest base minds; and it rather hints of *The Mermaid* than of "society." The young dramatist can surely be conceived as mixing with "unknown minds" in order to study human nature. Our high-handed editors must face the tests they profess to impose.

Further consideration might have suggested to the Professor that an actor poet like Shakespeare might, with his company on itineraries, or even in town, have to do more than simply act set parts; might have to contribute extra entertainment; nay, might have to pen occasional pieces in which he took part—to say nothing of the possibility that lines 3 and 4 may point to some of his early work that subsists, as well as to some that has not been preserved. Does the Professor think Shakespeare had written nothing for the stage, even in 1594, to say nothing of 1598?

The position of Professor Bradley, however, is otherwise perplexing. He denies any allusion to the life of the boards in Sonnet 110, but recognises such allusions elsewhere in that portion of the series. Where, then, if not in Sonnet 111? There "if anywhere,"

¹ Mr. Pooler at first glosses this as meaning "with nonentities"; but adds "or better perhaps, 'with strangers.'" Decidedly better; unless we are to compromise with Beeching and say that "society" consists of nonentities.

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comments Professor Tucker, "the poet is speaking of his profession as an actor." What, then, is at stake when it is denied that he does so in 110? If the stage life can in No. 111 be understood to be pleaded as an explanation of the poet's neglect of the friend, why should not the same kind of pleading be understood in the Sonnet that precedes? And how does the line "Which public means with public manners breeds" carry any clearer allusion to acting than does "made myself a motley to the view"? The old opponents of the Lamb interpretation negate it here just as in the other Sonnet. Dean Beeching and Professors Bradley and Tucker seem to draw a distinction that only serves to make Shakespeare charge himself in the first with gratuitously contemptible behaviour. That can hardly have been their purpose.

Again, we may infer that Beeching was reading the first seven lines of Sonnet 110 in connection with the second half, as part of a statement of the same set of circumstances, making the lines,

Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,

descriptive of the experience set forth in the opening lines down to "askance and strangely." But the text does not dictate this fusion of all the exposition into the one conception of having neglected an old friend in favour of new friends. The phrase "on newer proof" is elastic, and the purport is obscure. But when we return to the pregnant passage,

Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely,

we are surely led to divine a mental experience of a wider sort than a simple trying of new companions or friends in disregard of an old and tried one. The poet is avowing a past mood of troubled scepticism about

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all the values and aspects of life; and it is difficult to resist the inference that he had been "goring his thoughts" in some of his dramatic writing. In what way was he more likely to have done it?

Still we are left wondering what kind of "friend" he is addressing, and wherein his neglect has consisted. We are led to think of an early friend, man or woman, whom the young actor had for a time neglected. The difficulty of supposing this Sonnet to be addressed to Southampton is insuperable, especially if we are to assume that it was Southampton who was reproached in Sonnets 67, 69, and 93-6. "Thy pure and most most loving breast" reads impossibly in those connections. It was very natural, then, that Massey should find in this one of the "dramatic" Sonnets written by Shakespeare for Southampton to present in his own person to Elizabeth Vernon. But that only creates a new and even a greater difficulty. The whole conception of Southampton as employing his poet to express for him the most intimate of his thoughts and feelings towards the woman he rather fitfully loved is, though not impossible, distinctly unmanageable; and the lines which we can so readily understand as expressing Shakespeare's own experience are now made newly recalcitrant to acceptance. Even if the Sonnet *be* dramatic, it is not easily acceptable as one written for Southampton—still less, of course, for Pembroke.

Yet there is much plausibility in Massey's inference that the Sonnet is addressed to a woman. The last line would irresistibly suggest that, were it not for the other,

A God in Love to whom I am confined;

and Massey's contention that "A God" here means simply "a divinity," not "a male," is very important. As he argues, the phrase could not be turned "A goddess in love" though addressed to a woman; and

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the phrase in the ERRORS (III, ii, 39) "Are you a God?" actually addressed to a woman, is a warrant for reading "A God" as so addressed here. But if we reject as indigestible Massey's "dramatic" theory, we are left questioning, What manner of woman was so addressed by the poet? It cannot have been the Dark Lady; unless we are to suppose that she had first been endeared to him as a cordial sympathiser in his time of struggle, and only later developed in his regard a passional nature. And Sonnet 119 seems to convey an avowal of an unhappy affair now abandoned.

So long rooted has been the practice of taking the main body of the Sonnets as addressed without exception to one man—it matters not here whether he be called Southampton or Pembroke or an unknown "Mr. W. H."—that even this tentative procedure will probably be condemned by many. The habit of taking contiguity for homogeneity operates exactly like the habit of taking all the Plays in the Canon as necessarily of Shakespeare's writing and mostly of his planning. In that field, a state of uncritical belief dulls the perceptive faculties; and men exert themselves endlessly to explain how Shakespeare came to write a quantity of matter which he never wrote at all. In the Plays, this is demonstrable by all manner of morphological evidence. In the Sonnets, the evidence is of different kinds, and certain morphological tests applicable in the Plays do not operate at all. But there, too, discrimination is nevertheless possible, and it is as highly necessary, both as to authorship and as to destination. Already a number of voices have protested that the 126 Sonnets *cannot* have been all addressed to one man; and that all of the 154 cannot be Shakespeare's.

Let the "unsettled" student in the present connection, turn back from 110 and 111 to 109, which begins on the note, "O never say that I was false of heart," and he will recognise a connection of purport. Such a

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connection may at first glance seem to continue in 112; but there the closing lines express such an entire disregard for all the world save the person addressed that it reads very extravagantly alongside of 110. There *may* be identity of address, but on that view the Sonnets could not be close together in time. And in 113, if we suppose the same identity, there is again a break in time; while 114 describes a very different situation. It is not commonplace; it is not musical; it might as well be addressed to a woman as to a man; it might be non-Shakespearean. In the next two there is still disconnection, 116 in particular having ostensibly a new addressee. But in 117 we seem again to return to the theme and the personality of 109-11; and whereas the whole series 109-15 strongly hint of a woman as recipient, 117 in particular does so almost unquestionably. And now we reach a conception of a relation which *may* include that indicated in 110.

In 117 we have a lover returning to his allegiance; and the picture of errancy given in 110 is apparently confirmed by restatement:

Accuse me thus : that I have scanted all
Wherein I should your great deserts repay ;
Forgot upon your dearest love to call,
Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day ;
That I have frequent been with unknown minds,
And given to time your own dear-purchas'd right ;
That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
Which should transport me furthest from your sight.
Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
And on just proof surmise accumulate ;
Bring me within the level of your frown,
But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate ;
 Since my appeal says I did strive to prove
 The constancy and virtue of *your* love.

It is a tolerably audacious, indeed a barefaced pleading; but it is surely quite plainly a straying lover's appeal to a

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woman to whom he has given cause to feel that he had slighted her. "Your own dear-purchased right" cannot be the poet's phrase to his patron. Still less than 110 can this conceivably be addressed to a male patron. That interpretation is here wholly preposterous; and that it should ever have passed current for such a Sonnet is a striking evidence of the impercipientcy which can be set up by a presupposition. This is a Sonnet to a woman; and, collated with 110, can without difficulty pass as addressed to the recipient of that. The "God in Love" is now no difficulty.

If, then, 110 is "personal," and not "dramatic," this is in the same case; and the whole series of the same order falls more or less into line. Either way, it is still irreconcilable with the relation to the Dark Lady in the "betrayal" Sonnets, unless we regard it, with 119, as later than these, and as revealing a renunciation of that *liaison*. And there is, of course, no unlikelihood about Shakespeare's having had more love affairs than one; any more than about his having had more warm friendships than one. That manifold personality, of which the charm is incidentally testified to by several contemporary mentions, must have had manifold relations with the men and women around it. And though everybody might like to think that such Sonnets as these testify to a return of strayed love to the wife at home in Stratford, it is idle to claim for that any more probability than for any other guess. Anne Hathaway does not seem likely to have been a reader of sonnets.

But, finally, neither is it possible to exclude entirely the guess that this series of Sonnets in particular is "dramatic"; that they were written for another to present to a third person. The passage "That I have hoisted sail to all the winds that should transport me furthest from your sight" is conceivably a reference to the foreign expeditions of Southampton. Sonnet

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116, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediment," is at least as readily reconcilable with that hypothesis as with any other; though it can be conceived as referring to the marriage of Hervey to the Countess of Southampton in 1597. The love which does not "alter when it alteration finds" may be the poet's allusion to the love of the woman who had been tried by neglect but remains true. And here, once more, Massey's assignment of the other Sonnets as written for Southampton to present to Elizabeth Vernon has its measure of plausibility. That lady had certainly a "dear-purchased right" over her lover, if the contemporary gossip be true.¹

It is impossible, however, to take such a hypothesis as matter of knowledge; and it puts a strain on our acceptance even as a hypothesis. Collating Sonnets 110-11 with 117 and 119, we should have to discount all the apparent allusions to Shakespeare's own experience, and conceive Southampton giving a quite unlikely account of himself—unless we are to suppose him to have in the past thus used Shakespeare's pen. Perhaps, then, the careful listeners for the *cri du cœur* will still continue to find it there, and the voice Shakespeare's own, telling his own tale. But they must be faithful formulists indeed if they can so speak of such messages as from a poet to his patron. If those Sonnets are not to a woman, they are for us unintelligible posturings. And still, become intelligible as so read, they leave us facing an enigma. "We are still out of doors."

¹ "Lord Southampton has married Mrs. Vernon, whom he had got with child. Maids of the Court go scarce 20 weeks with child after they are married, and every man has liberty of conscience to play the knave" (Letter of R. Bayley to Col. Sir Wm. Stanley, November 19, 1598, Cal. of State Papers, 1598-1601, p. 121). This is certainly in keeping with the fact that Southampton by his marriage infuriated the Queen—a thing he was not likely to do without some pressing reason. See his letter to Secretary Cecil in July, 1597 (Cal. S.P., p. 448).

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§ 2. *Another Crucial Debate.*

As we have seen in our survey, another unsolved debate arises over the dating of Sonnet 107. The majority of readers, probably, have long acquiesced in the inference, first drawn, apparently, in 1859, that it points clearly to the year 1603, when, on the death of Elizabeth and the accession of James, Southampton was released from the Tower, where he had been imprisoned since 1601 for his connection with the conspiracy of Essex—the second imprisonment undergone by him; the first (1598) having been inflicted for his marrying Elizabeth Vernon, Essex's cousin, without the Queen's permission. All the circumstances indicated—the exceptionally balmy spring season, the “eclipse” of the “mortal moon,” the augurs mocking their own presage, and the advent of a time of assured peace—all chime with a multitude of comments on the situation in the literature of the time. On the face of the case, there could hardly be a clearer chronological inference.

Objections, however, have been raised to it; and a whole series of different dates have been proposed, some by Southamptonites, who do not see their way to accepting the gap thus created in the chronology of the Sonnets, of which the earliest cannot be dated later than 1593, and ought, on grounds above indicated, to be regarded rather as beginning about 1591. Other objections are made by Pembrokiens, who are bound to dismiss any reference to Southampton, and seek to connect the Sonnet with the collapse of the Essex rebellion in 1601, or the release of Pembroke from *his* imprisonment in that year. Mrs. Stopes, who has specially insisted on the early dating of the matrimonial Sonnets, has proposed for 107 the date 1596, when the Queen recovered from a serious illness: but admits,

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in her edition of the Sonnets (p. xi), that "it does not give any certain date." Butler's connection of the Sonnet with the defeat of the Armada need only be mentioned to be dismissed. Fleay ('Biog. Chron.' ii, 211) proposed the date April, 1598, when the Peace of Vervins was concluded, removing all fears of a Spanish invasion; and Professor Gollancz ('Temple' ed. of Sonnets, p. xix) strongly supports that view, arguing that the Herbertists are right in claiming that "hath her eclipse *endured*" cannot mean the Queen's death. In point of fact it very well might, the apparent implication being that the *mortal* moon, Cynthia, as the Queen was habitually named, had passed from the earthly scene to the heavenly.

But no proposed date finds general acceptance; and not only the esoteric Simpson but Dowden and Mr. Morton Luce have argued that no historic interpretation is necessary. Thus we have an enduring dissidence; and even if we individually decide for the 1603 date we have to face the question of the chronological gap thus created in the sonnet-series, on the assumption that the 126 are all or mostly all addressed to Southampton. Even if, with Mr. Forrest, we reject as ungentle the rather weakly wordy Sonnet 104, which speaks of three years having elapsed since the first meeting, the 102nd suggests the same date; and we have only 105 and 106 to fill a space which, in terms of the early time-limit forced on us by all the data as to the matrimonial Sonnets, amounts to nine years. This goes to strengthen Massey's view that 107 is the last of the Sonnets addressed to Southampton, Nos. 123-5 being by him regarded as dramatic, and written for the Earl during his imprisonment. It would be more plausible to connect 123-4 with 107, whatever we may think about the suspicious 125.

But if the Southampton Sonnets be thus delimited, there is the more ground for pressing the question of

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the destination of those discussed in the previous section, which so strongly suggest another recipient. And if the authenticity of 104 be felt to be dubious, much more so must be that of 103, which is devoid of all Shakespearean felicity. Only utter boredom over the task could to any measurable extent account for such inferiority of diction. And the difficulty does not end there.

§ 3. *The Limitations of the Southampton Theory.*

(Sonnets 17-35, 117-20.)

The difficulty, thus realised, of regarding Southampton as the *recipient* of all the 126 Sonnets had before been seen to arise as early as No. 26. That, of which the genuineness and the "personal" note seem obvious, is irreconcilable with several of the preceding, taken as belonging to one primary series. No. 20 we may agree to elide as ungentle; but doubt then tends to arise over 18, which reads like an attempt to outdo 17, with its more restrained "eternising." The fact that the appeal to marry and have a child is now for the first time absent from a sonnet of praise is another ground for doubt. But perhaps the strongest ground of all is the extravagant tumidity of the eternising in the last six lines. Yet Mr. Forrest gives this to Shakespeare with No. 19, which again is restrained; while he assigns 17 to "the Humorist," and 21, with its express protest against extravagance, to "the Lawyer." As if Warner could plausibly be supposed capable of such tuneful fluency.

Positing for consideration our own grounds for suspecting the emergence of an alien hand or hands, and thereby suggesting a limitation of the Southampton theory in respect of Shakespeare's sole and constant presence, we have next to note grounds for limiting it on the other side. Supposing that Shakespeare wrote

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No. 23 *for* Southampton, 24 is not so conceivable; and indeed, by its frequent infelicities and its weak repetitions, again suggests an inferior hand. But 25 already suggests another *recipient*. Taken as preceding in time No. 26, it is quite impossible as an address to the same patron: only contiguity could have set up such a notion. It seems quite Shakespearean, despite Mr. Forrest's ascription of it to Donne; and it ends with:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved,
Where I may not remove, nor be removed;

whereas 26 ends (not very happily) with:

Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
Till then, not show my head where thou may'st prove me.

Why, then, should not 25 be recognised as addressed to a woman, as it certainly would have been described if found only apart from the Thorpe Quarto?

Some of the Sonnets after the 17th are doubtless ambiguous. The 22nd might be understood as written for the Countess to her son, or otherwise as written for, say, Heneage to the Countess. But the 25th is not susceptible of either of these interpretations; and points to a woman recipient who is indicated as young. Massey, who could see no alien hand in the earlier Sonnets, and makes 18-26 all "personal" on Shakespeare's part, is withheld by his presuppositions from surmising any such thing. He has no difficulty in supposing the poet to feel already that his patron has given him a heart from which he cannot be removed, with Sonnet 26 to follow.

When we come to 27, again, we may at least so far agree with Mr. Forrest (who assigns it to Barnes) as to pronounce that it is quite poorly phrased, though the "jewel hung in ghastly night" recalls the much better line in ROMEO AND JULIET, "Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear." Only the first two lines are passably

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good; and these are commonplace: the rest are weakly pleonaſtic.¹ But however we may decide as to its authorſhip, it is not without extravagance that we can ſuppoſe it addreſſed to Southampton by his young protégé. The final line—

For thee and for myſelf no quiet find

—puts it beyond any ſuch labelling. All editors mark it as beginning a new ſeries, which it does: they do not inquire whether it is plauſibly to be connected with the preceding. It is, in fact, not even fitly to be regarded as addreſſed to a male, being much more naturally to be underſtood as addreſſed by a man to a woman whom he loves. And ſtill the man may not be Shakeſpeare.

The 28th Sonnet is in much the ſame caſe. Its firſt line connects it with the 27th; and its diction remains on nearly the ſame level. The line

When ſparkling ſtars twire not thou gild’ſt the even

—that is, “when ſparkling ſtars do *not* ſparkle, thou ſparkleſt”—falls even below the level of technical ſmoothneſs generally maintained in both pieces, and is not eaſily to be enunciated. Both Sonnets, in fact, ſuggeſt the hand of an amateur of fair gifts; and the main reaſon for rejecting Mr. Forreſt’s aſcription of them to Barnes is that his level is ſtill lower. There muſt have been many nameleſs ſonneteers in that age who could do better work than either Barnes or Griffin, both of whom were of the order of tyros who ruſh or let themſelves be pushed into print when better workmen ſhun it.

In this connection we are reminded of the anonymous Sonnet to Florio, printed with his SECOND FRUITS

¹ I regret to ſay that this Sonnet is one of the *Edelſteine* of Profeſſor Eichhoff.

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in 1591, which Minto claimed as a possible by-product of Shakespeare's. Thus it runs:

PHAETON TO HIS FRIEND FLORIO.

Sweet friend, whose name agrees with thy increase,
How fit a rival art thou of the Spring !
For when each branch hath left his flourishing,
And green-lock'd Summer's shady pleasures cease,
She makes the Winter's storms repose in peace,
And spends her franchise on each living thing :
The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing ;
Herbs, gums, and plants do vaunt of their release
So when that all our English wits lay dead
(Except the laurel that is ever green),
Thou with thy fruits our barrenness o'erspread,
And set thy flowery pleasance to be seen.
Such fruits, such flow'rets of morality,
Were ne'er before brought out of Italy.

There is here enough of limpidity and lyric *élan* to justify Minto's raising of the question. Had the Sonnet appeared in the Quarto, despite its Petrarchan form, the editors would have passed it without a murmur. But when, scared at any departure from the Canon, they argue that it is not sufficiently Shakespearean, we must support them. It *might* have been an early experiment of Shakespeare's, before he fixed on the simpler sonnet form; but there are many touches of diction in it which do *not* recall him, and a confusion of statement in lines 3-5 which is quite unlike him. The justifiable comment is simply that we have here a piece of work proving the existence of an anonymous sonneteer who could write tunefully enough to be capable of some of the second-rate things in the Thorpe Quarto.

Had the Quarto Sonnets 27-8 been found only in an old album with no poet's name, probably few critics would have admitted that they could be Shakespeare's;

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and if they had been found ascribed to Southampton himself, or to Sir William Hervey, no one, probably, would have proceeded to describe the author as a highly gifted poet. There is a very ordinary Elizabethan quality in such lines as:

But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind when *body's work's expired*

—the last a still more difficult huddle of syllables than that cited above from 28. It is not rash, but reasonable, to surmise that such cacophony is not of Shakespeare's making.

At this stage, indeed, it may be well to face the ground for hesitation confessed at the outset of the preceding chapter. If there is bad writing in the *VENUS*, and more in the *LUCRECE*, why should bad writing in the Sonnets be a ground for surmising alien hands? The answer is twofold. In the first place, the artificiality, the tinselly technique, of the poems is the coefficient of their artificial themes. These are truly "poetical exercises," and nothing more. That the *LUCRECE* is no better than it is must be accounted for as the result of sheer pot-boiling haste, for the Shakespeare of a few years later could hardly have failed to put more of tragic feeling into such a subject. But in the Sonnets, even at the outset, he is in better case to sing. The sonnet form imposed some degree of concision where the poems were compulsorily discursive for commercial reasons; and on an actual theme, an immediate topic, he would as surely tend to vitalise his diction as did the contemporary dramatists when they passed from such remote themes of rhetorical exercise as Tamburlaine and Selimus and Locrine to recent English history and such "domestic" tragedy as *ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM* and the *JEW OF MALTA*.

The other side of the answer is perhaps still more confidently to be pressed. The faultiness of the Poems

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is, I think, never a matter of versification. These streams of euphuism flow with a perfect smoothness: sense may be lacking, or may be outraged, but sound, scansion, is never out. There is no such portent as "body's work's expired" in their whole three thousand lines, if I may trust a memory which I cannot "refresh," and hesitate to justify, by yet another "journey in my head" through those desiccated gardens. The decent poverty of the two Sonnets under notice, in fine, is an un-Shakespearean poverty, in respect of their halting handling of a theme which Shakespeare could have turned to song as easily as any treated in the Quarto.

An average Shakespeare Sonnet comes dancing in, as it were, with the effortless grace of a bird, which after a few easy runs takes to its wings for a still easier flight, then comes to ground with the concluding couplet. Of perhaps fifteen of the first seventeen Sonnets, early as they are, may this be said. But 27 and 28 lack alike their elastic ease and their lyrically limpid phrase, making us think of a conscientious amateur tessellating his terms so as to get the utmost, if not the best, possibilities out of his one idea—"drooping eyelids open wide," "darkness which the blind do see," "my soul's imaginary sight," "my sightless view," "jewel"—"*ghastly* night"—"black night *beauteous* and her old face new." *Can* it be Shakespeare? Addressing a patron?

Over No. 29 there is no such misgiving. It is not one of the greatest, either in burden or in diction; yet it is one of the most poignantly interesting, for this does convey to us the cry of the heart, and that heart Shakespeare's. If those lines—

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least

—be not Shakespeare's, the Quarto is truly a mirage. And here, quite irresistibly, one is convinced that the

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recipient is not the patron. So addressed, the Sonnet would be self-stultifying. *With* a warmly friendly patron, what is the meaning of "in disgrace with fortune," "outcast state," "like to one more rich in hope," and "like him with friends possessed"? Once more, let us suppose the Sonnet to be found in a MS. collection without a name: would it not be spontaneously classed as addressed to a woman? So addressed, it is a felicitous compliment. Worldly poverty and unsuccess weigh down the spirit of the artist who knows he has not yet found or proved himself; and to the beloved woman he may say, "thy sweet love remembered," without the connotation "I forgot about *you*," which for the patron would lie on the surface. For her, the recital of sorrows is but the way of paying the tribute. The patron is either occulted or not yet emerged. For this may very well be a very early Sonnet, written even before the first seventeen.

And Sonnet 30 is in keeping with this interpretation. Mr. Forrest assigns it to his "Lawyer," but for most people it is Shakespearean in its music; though they commonly read "dear friend" as addressed to the male patron. But "friend" is as common an Elizabethan address to the loved one as is "lover" to the friend in our sense; and Sonnet 30 seems clearly to connect with 29; while the execution is hardly inferior, and betrays none of the incapacities revealed in 27 and 28. It therefore meets such tests as we can apply. It is in 31 that we feel a lowering of the technique, from the first line with its "Thy *bosom* is endeared." From the next line onwards the commentators are kept busy with explanation; and "all love's loving parts" in the third line seems a mere expletion. It is only the better lines, 5-6, that can set up a notion of Shakespeare's presence; and the whole burden remains odd, strained, and unsatisfactory.

It is to be confessed, of course, that *such* faults in a

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sonnet do not carry the same weight of challenge to authenticity as does cacophony, or sheer indigence of phrase. After all, no man, at least no English sonneteer, is reasonably to be supposed capable of writing a hundred quite successful sonnets. The sonnet is a curiously trying test. Tennyson, with his unsurpassed command of musical rhythm and diction, attains in that form only careful mosaics, as in the 'Montenegro'; while Browning, whose command of music is so precarious, achieves in 'Helen's Tower' a captivating success of free lyrism and spontaneous unity. Leigh Hunt has much better results in that form than are compassed by Coleridge; and Wordsworth, in his best, quite surpasses his normal self. Keats has splendid successes beside laboured failures. Shakespeare, then, is not to be expected always to find felicity, especially with a theme which is in itself a conceit. One can but say that 31 misses alike lucidity and unity of melody, and is on those grounds dubious.

To the 32nd, no such objections lie, though the second line—

And shalt *by fortune once more re-survey*

—might by its feebleness be made a ground for challenge. *This* is quite conceivably a Sonnet to the patron; and 33, with its very different burden, seems to come under the same category; while 34 so clearly connects with that as to stand on the same footing. But here we are face to face with a special problem. By all orthodox commentators these Sonnets are taken as indisputably addressed to *the* male friend, the patron, whoever it was. And this inference, though possibly right, is only a hypothesis like another. To a man, certainly, the two Sonnets seem to be addressed: it is not thinkable that the reproaches of 34 should be addressed to a woman. Massey makes the two Sonnets "dramatic,"

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and written for Elizabeth Vernon to send to Southampton—a quite unacceptable hypothesis, especially when it is extended to 41 and 42, and further connected with 40, 133, 134, the last three being grouped as addressed by the lady to her cousin Lady Rich, while 33, 34, 35, 41, 42 are addressed by the same speaker to Southampton. Here we have the “dramatic” theory at its wildest. It is much easier to conceive the Sonnets as Shakespeare’s own than as thus composed for a distracted Maid of Honour who employs the actor-poet as her scribe. That she should want to send sonnets at all in the supposed circumstances seems a fantastic supposition.

But we have no clear situation even when we elect to take the Sonnets as personal. No. 33 is a bolt from the blue after 32, which offers no clue; and it is only a possibility that the destination is the same. We can but say that 32-4 seem all to be Shakespearean in execution; and that the disruption of purport warns us that there may be disruption in destination. Contiguity, once more, must not be allowed to stand for connection. And a new difficulty arises with the next Sonnet. In point of destination it seems distinctly connected with 34, which in execution is but little inferior to 33, and is in turn visibly connected with that. But the execution of 35 is anomalously faulty; and its purport is signally disconcerting if it be addressed to a man; while the case is no better if “thy sensual fault” be said to a woman. But for the evidence that the offender has expressed deep contrition, we might say that forgiveness in this sort has maudlin airs, and at best belongs to the morbid psychology of a Dostoyevsky. And the execution, conceived as Shakespeare’s, is intelligible only as that of a shaken spirit. The line

Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are,

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in which the 'thy's' are Capell's emendations for the repeated 'their' of the Quarto, may be made sense by following Capell and reading 'bear' for 'are.' But the commentators who agonise over such difficulties are in worse case over the next line:

For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense.

Professor Tucker, following others, is content to gloss it: "sense=good reasons," which is an inadequate solution. "*Good* reason" is the one thing avowedly *not* introducible. The bad pun was by Gildon plausibly enough replaced by another, by reading "incense," which recommended itself to Malone; whereupon Steevens commented: "I think I can venture to affirm that no English writer, either ancient or modern, serious or burlesque, ever accented the substantive 'incense' on the last syllable"; and this bluster appears to have cowed all the commentators. But Steevens was *capable de tout*. Better than any of the other Variorum men he knew Elizabethan literature; and he must have known that Chapman, like Spenser, has dozens of these false (really archaic) stresses in *THE SHADOW OF NIGHT*, *IVID'S BANQUET*, *HERO AND LEANDER*, and elsewhere. Sir John Davies, in his complimentary sonnet to Chapman on the *BANQUET*, has the pronunciation 'artist,' to make a rhyme with 'miss'd'; and another sonnet on the same poem rhymes 'jewel' with 'hell.' Barnes makes 'comfort' rhyme with 'disport.' The habit is a survival from the half-French enunciation of Chaucer's age. In Surrey we have indifferently the stresses pàlace and palàce; àltar and altàr; also fortune, refuge, labour, neighbour, pictures, captive (sb.); and in Chapman's *HYMNUS IN CYNTHIAM* we have 'face' rhyming with 'palace.' Why then should not Chapman, or another, once in a way stress the noun 'incense' like the verb? That is the accentuation of Chaucer:

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And more encens into the fyre he caste

Knight's Tale, 1572 (A 2429) ;

The mirre, thencens, with al so greet odour

Id., 2080 (A 2938) ;

Ne encens upon hir auter sette a-fyre

Troilus and Creseyde, V, 1466.

'Incense,' then, would seem to be probably the right reading. But I cannot recall any such archaic scansions in Shakespeare: where his pronunciation is archaic for us, as in *aspèct*, *revèue*, *recòrd* (sb.), it was *the* pronunciation of his day. Thus we are again at a stand.¹ Another hand seems to intervene in a sequence which points to one recipient, and that with a burden of feeling which seems to repel any theory of competitive "exercises." That enigma appears insoluble in terms of our present knowledge; and the problem of the Dark Lady, which is already raised in the Sonnets we have been considering, is on the same footing of mystery. There is nothing for it, at this stage, but to posit the grounds for surmising an alien hand, and to proceed with the inquiry at other points.

It is in Sonnet 120, as to which no challenge can be raised on the score of style, that we seem to pick up again the clues from 35. Mr. Pooler marks it as a continuation of 119, which it surely is not, stating as it does a quite different situation. It may indeed be claimed to belong to the same stage; but it may be as well connected with 117 or previous numbers; and it rather suggests a different recipient. In any case,

¹ It is relevant to note that in Chapman's section of *HERO AND LEANDER* (3rd Sestiad, ll. 173-4) we have one of the notes of this Sonnet :

To look of one abash'd is impudence,
When of slight faults he hath too deep a sense.

And if it be argued that Chapman would not write thus to Southampton, the answer is simply that it is probably addressed to someone else.

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the essential thing is that it refers us back to the old wrong, keenly complained of and sadly forgiven, but now keenly recalled in answer to a complaint of wrong:

the trespass now becomes a fee ;
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

Is *this* to be supposed a Sonnet to Southampton ? The assumption is as inadmissible here as the case of 109-12. The line

I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken

will not square with any view of the patron. Certainly it makes short work, on that view, of Lee's generalisation as to the poet's use of "weapons of flattery." So ill does it fit that we are set asking once more whether the Sonnet before us is not addressed to a woman. Sonnet 119 is most easily so understood. But the rupture dealt with in 33-5 proceeds upon a man's offence; and the residual inference would seem to be that the man is not Southampton but another. When, then, we remember that Hervey was also a young man, to say nothing of his being a "Will," and that he may reasonably be surmised to have been cherished by the young Shakespeare as a friend, we have at least a plausible possibility to put in the place of the quite unmanageable assumptions (1) that all the 126 Sonnets are addressed to one man, and (2) that that man was the "boy" Southampton.

Nowhere is it more unacceptable than at Sonnet 118. Only on a conception which would practically involve the Butler theory is that to be read as addressed to a man at all. It is on any view ill-conceived, and so crude in thesis that only the general force of the phrasing can withhold us from suspecting its authenticity. Why, we ask, was such a Sonnet written? Mr. Pooler again marks it a "continuation" of the preceding. But it strikes quite a different key; and

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if we could ever justify a theory of "competition" to account for the variations on kindred themes in these Sonnets, we might welcome it here. There is indeed, as aforesaid, a certain cynical hardihood in the conclusion of 117; but this is cynicism in collapse, a blundering expansion of a sally. In literary taste, and in execution, it suggests the author of the "Will" sonnets, who cannot have been Shakespeare. In any case, it is unintelligible for us save as addressed to a woman; and it may now be useful to collect the numerous cases in which that solution obtrudes itself in the Quarto.

§ 4. *Sonnets* (a) *Inferably Dramatic*: (b) *Written to, or*
(c) *for Women*

Nos. 23-5, 27-8, 31, 36 (37-9), 43-52 (54), 56-62 (63-5), 66, 71-4, 81, 88-93, 97-8, 103-5-8. A documentary hypothesis.

We have incidentally seen grounds for tentatively describing as "dramatic" Sonnets 23-5, 27-30, some of them of inferior quality; also, more doubtfully, 109-15, 117, which on any view point to a woman recipient. The same hypothesis obtrudes itself, with varying degrees of insistency, in yet other places early and late in the series, both as to Sonnets that look un-Shakespearean and some which appear to be genuine. The 24th has for me quite an alien air in respect of its poverty of theme and diction, to say nothing of its repeated rhyme of "heart" and "art" which in itself might pass as a piece of carelessness, but in a poem of slovenly psychosis accentuates the laxity of the whole. But, genuine or ungenuine, it may very well have been addressed to a woman; and the same claim holds good of 25, which can without difficulty pass as the young Shakespeare's.

The 27th and 28th, again, have been challenged above as the work of a careful amateur; but they too

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invite classification as destined to a woman—another woman, that is, on the hypothesis put. When nine sonnets out of ten were penned to or upon women there can be small question of tracing the women recipients in the case of untraced poets. Passing 29 and 30, already discussed, we look askance at 31, ill-phrased, ill-conceived, and ill-reasoned; but may content ourselves with surmising that that too may be a normal sex sonnet. And, after passing the enigmatic three, 33-5, we are again arrested at 36. It is only the illusory influence of contiguity that can set up a quite confident assumption here that the recipient is a male. Beeching goes so far as to recognise that 36-9 must refer to a different topic from that discussed in the Sonnets immediately preceding. We may fitly go further and ask whether they are all addressed to the same person. In Sonnet 36 the eighth line tells strongly against that view; and the possibilities of a situation in which the actor might fear to compromise a woman whom he loved are surely abundant.

The strongest argument for the old interpretation, perhaps, is the 37th Sonnet, which partly squares with it and seems to connect with it in final purport. But Sonnet 37, with its praise of the "worth and truth" of the recipient, clashes with all the previous reproaches, and is further, in point of execution, not at all clearly Shakespearean. The long debate over the word "lame" seems to have barred critical recognition of the inferior quality of the whole piece. It is certainly addressed to a man, but to what man and by whom? The connection with 36 becomes dubious the moment these questions are faced.

The 38th Sonnet, though it makes no mention of the recipient's sex, may pass as addressed to the patron; but if the 39th, by contiguity, be read as to the same address from the same speaker, it must be admitted to set up that unpleasant impression of which Hallam

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complained—the impression of a weakly unmasculine personality. Massey might have been expected to see here a case that clearly called for a “dramatic” interpretation, which should read the Sonnet as addressed by a woman to a man. But just where such an interpretation seems to be almost imperative he elected to see a personal Sonnet from Shakespeare to Southampton, which he confessed to be unsatisfactory in point of ideation. That it is written by a woman seems unlikely, though that possibility should not be lost sight of, here and at other points. A woman, one guesses, would be unlikely to write:

O absence, what a torment wouldst thou prove,
Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave
To entertain the time with thoughts of love.

But, conceived as a “poetical exercise” *on behalf of* a woman in love, it might pass. And still it may not be Shakespeare’s, having certainly little of his vivifying touch.

Dismissing as visionary Massey’s explanation of the next three Sonnets as written for Elizabeth Vernon, the first to her seductive cousin Lady Rich and the others to her lover, we come again to a problem of destination in the series 43-7. All are of second- or third-rate quality and seem to be quite non-Shakespearean; but in any case all might have been addressed to a woman; and, found in an old album without signature or superscription, would have been so understood. This test, which the commentators seem never to put to themselves, must be insisted on as the alternative to a mechanical interpretation of the bulk of the Quarto in the sole light of the cryptic phrase of a piratical publisher of whom we have no reason to believe that he was fully informed, and less reason still to think him trustworthy.

Let it be confessed that these five Sonnets, though

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devoid of memorable felicity of thought, feeling, or phrase, are above the average level of the group of minor sonneteers of the period; while, on the other hand, they cannot plausibly be ascribed to the better poets, Daniel and Drayton, who looked after their own work. But what has been suggested above in regard to 27 and 28 may apply here. Men who would not undertake the ill-advised labour of a sonnet-cycle—the kind of mechanical production which brought sonneting into disrepute—might well be capable, not only of such a sonnet as that to Florio, but of a handful of fair pieces on special motives; and the hypothesis of one or more fairly competent amateurs, producing small sets of passable sonnets, may be pressed as at least no more unlikely than that of Shakespeare's producing such sets, on tolerable themes, without once seeming to find his true singing voice.

The 48th Sonnet, it has been above suggested, reads as if coming from a woman to a man, and might be regarded, by those who are sceptical about an unknown woman poet, as penned by Shakespeare for the woman. From a man to a man, it does not read at all naturally, on any theory of "Platonic" diction or of Renaissance friendship. There is nothing here of the love of Montaigne and La Boétie, or even of Italianate extravagance. Nor does it read any more plausibly as from a man to a woman. It fits only as a woman's message to a man; and it is perhaps most fitly to be understood as from a mother to a son. Thus it might, in turn, be "dramatic."

Even the 49th, again, might be addressed to a woman, though the claim as not to be strongly stressed. But 50-2 again set up the question, Why are they to be supposed addressed to a man? The first two are for the most part on the plane of 27-8, 43-7, only the 52nd giving us the sense of Shakespeare's singing voice. If Shakespeare wrote all the others, he was at

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least on the plane of "poetical exercises" rather than of that of the poet who sings because he must. And that, perhaps, if we are to take it as really Shakespeare's, is the fitting judgment to be passed on 53, ostensibly addressed to a man. For here, again, we have the anomaly of the closing line,

But you like none, none you, for constant heart,

which reads so strangely after the Sonnets of reproach, and must be held to antedate them, if taken as addressed to the same man. And the same comment applies to 54, addressed to a "beauteous and lovely [=lovable] youth" who is extolled as having his beauty enhanced by the ornament of "truth," which capacitates him to be sung about, like an odorous rose; whereas concerning those of whom, like scentless roses, we can say that "their *virtue* only is their show," singing is impossible! Save for an asyndeton, it is a quite musical Sonnet. And none the less is it a very absurd one. "Poetical exercise" is quite the seemliest way of dismissing it.

Passing 55 as an evidently alien thing, accounted for as such in a previous chapter, we come again upon a series, 56-62, which raise the question of the sex of the recipient. In the 56th, indeed, love itself, not the loved one, is apostrophised, though there is distinct implication of a past sunderance of two, whether lovers or friends. But in 57 "your slave" and "your servant" are obviously compatible with a female destination; and the 58th very distinctly sets up a surmise of the Dark Lady.

The "Time" Sonnets, 59-60, seem by their andante music to repel doubts of authorship, and may fitly be read as addressed to the patron; but who will profess to hear in them a *cri du cœur*? The 61st might be so styled; but here, again, who will dispute that the Sonnet is far more likely to be from a man to

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a woman (or *vice versa*) than from a man to a man? No human being, surely would regard it in the last light if it stood alone. And if the 62nd may be so read, as from an old or elder man to a younger, it certainly does not suggest an address to a distinguished patron. The long debate as to whether Shakespeare in his thirties might describe himself as

Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
seeing that Drayton at that age wrote,

Age rules my lines with wrinkles in my face,
might now be closed by common sense. Wrinkles may come in the thirties; and Drayton, to judge from his portraits, was an early-wrinkling subject; but "tann'd antiquity" is another thing. Why should not criticism admit that this Sonnet may either be non-Shakespearean or penned by Shakespeare (*a*) for an older man, for presentation to a woman, or (*b*) for an elderly woman to present to her son?

The last certainly seems a difficult, and will perhaps be pronounced a fantastic hypothesis. For Sonnet 63, also delivered as from one

With Time's injurious hand crush'd and outworn,
winds up with the claim for the beautiful loved one
that

His beauty shall in these *black lines* be seen,
And they shall live, and he in them still green;

which again points to another of the "Time" Sonnets, 65, ending:

Unless this miracle have might
That in *black ink* my love shall still shine bright.

And 65 connects with 64. It seems difficult to doubt that all these "Time" Sonnets are from one hand.

Mr. Forrest, with his "confounding *theory's* cruel knife," cuts the knot by giving Shakespeare only 64,

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assigning 63 and 65 to his Muse-favoured "Lawyer," enamoured of ink. But there are some finer lines in 65 than any in 64. These—

How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower ?

—are surely better inspired than :

Ruin hath taught me thus to *ruminate*,
That Time will come and take my love away.

I suppose Mr. Forrest feels that those touches about "black lines" and "black ink" are more lawyerlike than lyrical. But even if the mythic lawyer had not been identified with the wingless William Warner, one must demur. The "black ink" and "black lines" are only—and only for us of to-day—verbal blots upon a thesis that is "all one, ever the same." If 63 and 65 be denied to Shakespeare, 64 cannot well be retrieved. All have the same canorous quality: Mr. Forrest himself must count his rejects here among the "fine" Sonnets that he proposes to disestablish. He really asks, by implication, too much; though it is thinkable that all three Sonnets are non-Shakespearean. Better let the convention stand that these Sonnets are the poet's wails for the ultimate mortality of the patron whom he expects to outlive him than have the "fell hand" of theory down-raise "fine" Sonnets merely to fulfil a scheme of competitions of four, who must all be provided for at any critical cost. These Sonnets are "most musical, most melancholy"; and we cannot add, as in the case of 54, "most muddle-headed."

With 66, surely Shakespearean, though left by Mr. Forrest unassigned, we pass from the sex-problem till we reach 71, though, as is noted in another chapter, some raise questions of authenticity. But over 71 we must again ask, Why is this to be taken as necessarily addressed to the patron? This and 72 are not

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rationally assignable, as by Mr. Forrest, to Barnes: it is doubly unreasonable, on his own theory, to assign two sonnets on one theme to the same competitor—as he has already done in respect of the “Time” Sonnets; and these are too “fine” for a fifth-rate poet. But they are more fittingly to be reckoned as addressed to a woman than as addressed to a man—a woman, that is, of some rank or station. Only on the hypothesis of the poet’s expectation of speedy death at an early age, before the episode which evoked the Sonnets of reproach, are they to be satisfactorily read as addressed to the patron, if he is to be reckoned the person reproached.

But in 73—where happily we are all agreed, barring Dr. Eichhoff, that we are listening to Shakespeare at his best—the problem of the speaker’s age at once arises, sending us back to the “Time” Sonnets, 63-5, which again implicate 59 and 60. It is not even a moderately young man, conscious of sinking strength, who is speaking: “that time of *year*” is the time of real old age. And if the student has declined to conceive that the other “aged” Sonnets are “dramatic,” can he be still equally confident? The recipient is told:

This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong
To love that well which thou must leave ere long

—*leave* having clearly the force of *lose*, and thus suggesting the reading *leese*. If it be denied that this is necessarily to be read as written *for* a quite elderly person, the denier must proceed to explain how in Sonnet 81 the same speaker can say to the same recipient:

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten.

And even if the student judiciously decides, in bold defiance of Professor Mackail, to dismiss 81 as non-

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Shakespearean, he will still find himself hard pressed for an interpretation of 73 as "personal" to Shakespeare. The closing lines refuse to be interpreted as from the poet to his "high-stated" patron. Is it, then, any the worse? If we should feel bound to rank it as dramatic, written for a mother to her son, does it become a less beautiful thing than even the best of the Sonnets of reproach, which end in couplets that half gainsay the cry of the heart?

Leaving that issue for further separate discussion, and passing 74,¹ as clearly a continuation of 73, we find 75 raising the same doubt about the sex of the recipient as does 76. Here again we have Sonnets which would easily have passed as addressed to a woman if they were found separate from the collection. Only the presupposition of the continuity of the subject in the whole series of 126 could have set up a contrary hypothesis. Certainly the occurrence of a number of previous Sonnets ostensibly to the patron is a support to that hypothesis here; but this does not apply to 75. The 77th, on the other hand, which clearly connects with the 122nd, does suggest a male recipient, inasmuch as a poet was hardly likely to tell a woman, in a friendly mood, to count her wrinkles. But Sonnet 122, which appears to refer to the same matter, is ostensibly a reply to a reproach, by the writer of that, for giving his gift away. Shakespeare, then, cannot have written both, and may not have written either. I think he did not.

In the series 75-80, 82-7, we are in the toils of the problem of the Rival Poet, with no reason to suspect a female presence; and 88-90 seem still to involve the

¹ Here, as has been often observed, line 11,

The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
strongly suggests a reference to Marlowe's death, and a date near that in time.

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patron, though this is far from certain. They might be dated, in respect of the line (90, 13)

Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,

in 1596, when Shakespeare was unsuccessfully applying for a coat of arms. Taine, perhaps, saw in this and the next three Sonnets the lady of somewhat high station whom he supposes the poet to have adored for a time. "Be absent from thy walks" (89, 9) has always seemed to me very hard to associate with the relation between Shakespeare and his patron. On the other hand, it leaves us wholly in the dark as to the possible woman involved. She might be, after all, Mistress Mary Fitton. But that way fantasy lies; and the "dramatic" hypothesis here becomes plausible just by reason of the difficulty of the others. We can but say that Sonnets 88-93 seem to hang together; and that the close of the 93rd is much more compatible with a female than with a male destination.

In 94, 95, and 96, however, the inference is the other way; though here again it is extremely difficult to suppose that Shakespeare is in his own person addressing Southampton. In face of such Sonnets as these, Lee's generalisation as to Shakespeare's use of weapons of flattery recoils on itself. It is no flatterer who thus gravely arraigns the youth addressed. Again the "impersonal" theory obtrudes itself; though it is hard to suggest a probable causation. It is not the mother who can be supposed thus to address her son. Massey's account of 94-6 as written for Elizabeth Vernon to send to Southampton, after grouping 87-93 as written for Southampton to send to her, is a priori so plausible that only the extreme difficulty of supposing the two lovers thus to employ Shakespeare as a mouth-piece can be urged to the contrary. But when, waiving a priori arguments, we come to the concrete, we have the situation of Southampton suggesting doubts

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of Mistress Vernon's constancy while she is deploring to him the "shame" which

Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name,
and making the tender appeal:

Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege.

These things do not consist, and we must repel the false symmetry of a theory which ignores such anomalies. But the fact that such groups of Sonnets can a priori be conceived as addressed, one by *a* man to *a* woman, and the other by *a* woman to *a* man, is still an argument against the mechanical labelling of all the 126 in one way.

And when we come to 97-8, to say nothing of 99, which is so probably spurious, yet still addressed to a woman, the patron is again to be barred as the recipient—unless, that is, we are to lean to the Butler theory. These are naturally to be read as Sonnets to a woman. It is with Sonnet 100, and thence on to 108, that we come again to the patron, in a series of one cast, though not easily to be conceived as from one pen. The poet of 102, admitted by Mr. Forrest to be Shakespeare, writes:

I sometime hold my tongue
Because I would not dull you with my song;

but here are eight Sonnets (107 being a new and different thing) all doing just that. And in this group we have three declarations which have perhaps done more than anything else to keep in countenance the assumption that all the first 126 Sonnets are addressed to Southampton:—

For to no other pass my verses tend,
Than of your graces and your gifts to tell (103);

Since all alike my songs and praises be,
To one, of one, still such, and ever so (105);

I must each day say o'er the very same,
Counting no new thing old, thou mine, I thine (108).

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But these very declarations really counter the assumption in question. They hold only for Sonnets of the same kind. The conclusion of 105—

Fair, kind and true, have often lived alone,
Which three, till now, never kept seat in one

—is in another psychic world than that of the Sonnets of reproach and remonstrance. If these Sonnets of adulatory tribute are the “pass” to which “my verses tend,” the others are either from another poet or to another person who is not “still such, and ever so.” Our enigma remains unsolved; and even the inquest as to authenticity does not dispel it. To attempt to distinguish between the hands of 103, 105, 108, is to set up a fresh puzzle as to different poets professing to be always addressing the same patron and avowing the sameness of their work. The whole batch is perhaps more fitly to be regarded as a spurt of new production after a silence; and on that view we are more than ever debarred from seeing the serious Sonnets preceding as *also* addressed to the patron. No. 103 might very well come from Barnes, about his poor best, but it implicates 105 and 108, of which the last has much the best lines. A hypothesis to the effect that Barnes, having seen a Shakespeare Sonnet to the returned patron (“fond on praise”), wrote another, or more, in the same style, is attractive, but indemonstrable. We can but leave open the question whether the “all one” Sonnets may not all be from one hand, and that not Shakespeare’s.

There is no good critical warrant for discrimination; and the theory of “competition” seems here especially unacceptable. The patron who sets his first protégé’s sonnet as a theme for rival sonneting is always a fantastic conception; and here he becomes unthinkable. It would be a little more satisfactory to accept Massey’s solution that 104 should be placed earlier, and the rest

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labelled as a new tribute to Southampton on his return from abroad. But at once there arises the objection that in such a case the natural course would be to speak of such a return; and that is not done. The fact is that, save in 107, we get in the Quarto no traceable allusion to Southampton's experiences, of which we might so naturally expect express mention. The more reasonable course is to place this batch of patron Sonnets about 1594-5, regarding the Southampton connection as having then lasted four years, and dating 107, of course, later.

And this view is the more reasonable because in 107, and in 109 and its congeners, we are again in another psychic world, far removed from the conventional sonneting to the patron. These later Sonnets, up to 120, have already been discussed as wholly intractable to the "patron" key; and 121 is equally so. Mr. Forrest's interesting theory that it is written by Southampton raises the question why, if the Earl were capable of so vigorous a piece, he should not be credited with others? The enigma is not to be so solved. Sonnet 122, breaking away from its group, has already been dealt with. To Shakespeare we return (*pace* Mr. Forrest, who gives them to Donne) in 123 and 124; and there, it may well be, Shakespeare's part in the first miscellany ends, since 125 has markedly alien airs, and the non-Sonnet 126, though it has strong lines, is but doubtfully Shakespearean. In any case, it ends on an enigmatic note, and is plausibly to be placed at the end of the section only on the ground that it tells of lapse of time. It has small consistence with much of what has preceded; and to call it an *envoy* to the whole is, as many critics have observed, a quite arbitrary labelling.

Looking back at this point on the whole series, I find myself newly attracted to an old guess that the title "Shakespeare's Sonnets" may have been that

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of a MS. collection made by Hervey in an album beginning with the matrimonial Sonnets. The primary title would naturally be left standing in the album, supposing it to be further used for more sonnets. Blank pages, which might for the owner indicate changes of hand, would be disregarded by the editor-publisher into whose hands the album ultimately came. For many reasons, the album-owner might abstain from noting the names of the authors of sonnets by other hands. Some of them might be his own; and we could thus conceive him as the author of the "Will" sonnets, whether or not we surmise him to be the false friend. If, as the hypothesis implies, he was not only Shakespeare's friend but much interested in all sonneting, many Sonnets by Shakespeare, to whomsoever addressed, would come to his hands, to be copied into the old album, with others by other hands. Known to have belonged to Hervey, and perhaps bearing his name, the entire collection, having but one title, that meant originally for Shakespeare's sole work, could be regarded by a publisher, interested above all things in printing a saleable book, as "begotten" by Hervey in the fashion assumed by our theory of his primary action. Thus we can understand the informal title "Shakespeare's Sonnets" appearing on the printed Quarto; and the COMPLAINT, if found at the end of the same album without a signature, would be added as Shakespeare's also. It is all hypothesis, but the hypothesis seems to meet the case.

CHAPTER VI

THE "IMPERSONAL" THEORY

OUR survey has shown that the view of the Sonnets as wholly or mainly consisting of "poetical exercises" has been widely prevalent, from its first formulation by the younger Boswell to our own day. Like other theories, it had been inexactly and sweepingly put, and it has in consequence been more or less sweepingly denied by critics who would hardly have treated it as untenable had it been put with distinct specifications and reservations; unless they are of those who cannot see that a good many of the Sonnets lack depth of feeling and force of thought.

There are three strong primary grounds for such a hypothesis, if under the term "impersonal" we include the force "dramatic." In the first place, the great mass of the ostensibly "personal" Elizabethan sonnets are just poetical exercises, even if in certain cases the sonneteers were set exercising by a "passion." The thing had been a mere craze in France and Italy for long before; and a large number of the English sonnets are little more than translations. To argue, as did Dowden, that even conventional sonnets proceed on feeling and experience, is really to say nothing to the purpose. Feeling and experience are obviously essential to all poetic writing. What we are discussing is the difference between deep personal feeling and that which is (*a*) but reflected, imitative, derivative, or, on the other hand (*b*), dramatic.

Secondly, the seventeen matrimonial Sonnets which open the Quarto are on any reasonable interpretation "poetical exercises," written to order by a willing and

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facile hand. That all the rest of the 154, supposing them all authentic, should be strictly "personal," is a priori improbable. And, thirdly, the fact that the poet is a dramatist supplies not only a ground for surmising that he *would* write impersonal sonnets—that is, sonnet missives on behalf of others—but an answer to the sweeping protest that "here" we find "cries of the heart"; as if that could fitly be said of even half of the series. Even if it could, the claim is indecisive. It is, indeed, an oddly uncritical course for those who see in Shakespeare the greatest dramatic master of feeling—that is, the greatest framer of living utterance *for others*—to take every moving utterance in the Sonnets as necessarily made in his own person. Might not he who in his dramas found living and moving speech for such a multitude of imagined people achieve something in the same kind for actual people in sonnets?

To deny the possibility, or even the likelihood, is to approximate to the position of Mr. Frank Harris, so singularly acclaimed a decade or two ago. For that publicist, most of the "sympathetic" male characters in the Plays are but revelations of Shakespeare's own character and temperament; and where a number diverge too outrageously from any pretence of such possibility they are described as "puppets"—a simplicity of critical method which seems to have recommended itself to some, but must have staggered more. Claiming to have put an entirely new conception, Mr. Harris was but reducing to crass absurdity the old proposition of Maurice Morgann, that the characters of Shakespeare are "but different *modifications of his own thought*." Clearly so, as *all* fictive characters, whether sympathetic or antipathetic, whether ventriloquial puppets or utterly lifelike creations, are but modifications of the thought of their framers, whether with or without conscious reproduction of the traits

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of actual persons. But it could never have occurred to the highly competent mind of Morgann, whose aim was the exposition of the *genius* of Shakespeare, to suggest that the poet was exhibiting *himself* in Falstaff. His dramatic genius consisted precisely in the power to think himself, or feel himself, "into" wholly different imagined personalities; for the moment, and for the moment only, "identifying himself" with them.

It is, perhaps, fitly to be remembered, in fairness to the chorus of Mr. Harris's disciples, that they had been encouraged, by one very brilliant school of modern English—or rather, Irish—drama, to regard the art as one of mere self-expression on the part of the artist. In Oscar Wilde's and Mr. Shaw's plays, it is true, the characters, male and female alike, in general are but literary mouthpieces of the playwright, to the point of voicing his self-contradictions of epigram. But drama in the hands of Shakespeare, and indeed, in the hands of most dramatists before Wilde (Jonson is a noted exception), is quite another thing. Shakespeare is not a consummate *mot*-ing machine like Wilde, or a versatile producer of "Messages" like Mr. Shaw. Unlike both of those accomplished operators, he includes a great tragedian, with a vision of life which vitalises all his dramatic writing. He is, in a word, the dramatist of human interaction, absorbed in the spectacle, not in himself. The wit of his characters is the flash of their conflict, not that of the epigrammatic essayist. You cannot possibly think of "Shakespeare in petticoats": in those other cases you cannot long think of most of the women save as male epigrammatists or propagandists in skirts. A Wilde dialogue is a Wilde essay in which the minor speaker is but a runner-up for the other; and a Wilde play is largely a Wilde essay in epigram, distributed in parts of amazing brilliance, with a strained story, in itself a dramatised epigram, to hold it together. A Shaw play is a more

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powerful and more lifelike manipulation of theses. In Shakespeare, theses are subordinate to action: "the play's the thing," where for Wilde, quite truly, "the thing's the play." *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*, which contains so much magnificent non-dramatic writing, partly conforms to the essay or thesis form. But the result is that it is a bad *play*, as all will testify who have seen it acted in full. And that is an isolated thing in Shakespeare. As a dramatist he is quite accurately to be described as "myriad-minded."

The Shakespeare, then, who could utter, at will, with supreme power and fitness, the *cri du cœur* of a hundred differing men and women, could surely produce it in a Sonnet not written in his own person; nay, might compass it specially well in a Sonnet written for someone he knew. A priori, this is so reasonable that it is not to be supposed to be denied by anybody save editors unduly bent on discrediting other editors or commentators. But the a priori proposition really does not carry us far; and there are a priori checks to it, over and above the special rejoinders that are fitly to be made in respect of particular Sonnets.

To begin with, Shakespeare is on the face of the case singularly economical in "poetical exercises" on his own account. The two signed poems are visibly written for the market: the Plays are written in the way of business for his company. Had he wished to add to his fame as a rhyming poet he could easily have eclipsed his two narrative poems, or issued a good collection of "sugred sonnets," and others, long before 1609. Those who will, or can, may believe that he wrote *A LOVER'S COMPLAINT* and the whole (not merely the *Threnos*) of *THE PHCENIX AND THE TURTLE*; but even on that view he is signally little given to the exercise of his infinite productive powers apart from the field in which he can be seen to be truly interested, as he was incomparably endowed.

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Beyond, therefore, the writing of Sonnets specially commissioned by persons to whom he felt obligation, or the occasional penning of *vers de société*, or of a detached serious Sonnet in a moved mood or to please an asking friend, he is not really likely to have produced a large number of Sonnets as mere random "exercises." He does not seem to have been that way given. Unless some chance to be preserved in the Quarto, the verses in which he *must* have tried his prentice hand, in his 'teens or his twenties, have simply perished. And one feels that he was the very last man to care about preserving them. If, for instance, he had written the "Will" sonnets in his boyhood, he would not have passed them on to friends at thirty. As a matter of fact, they belong to the sonneteering decade, like the rest; and they are not his.

If, then, there are "impersonal" Sonnets in the Quarto, they are to be presumed to have been written on one or other, or all, of three motives. A number may quite conceivably have been written *for* either men or women friends, under some such circumstances as have been contemplated in previous chapters. And on that side, for the reasons above urged, we must be chary of assuming that the vibration of feeling excludes the possibility of a given Sonnet being impersonal. The valid limitations to the general proposition of possibility are these:

1. That certain Sonnets, such as those reproaching the friend for robbing the speaker of his mistress, cannot conceivably have been written *for* anybody. Such things, we may say, "are not done."

2. The vituperative Sonnets to the Dark Lady are in the same case.

3. Such Sonnets as those concerning the rival poet or poets are equally unimaginable as having been written *for* others. Genuine or ungenuine, they are penned in the writer's own person.

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4. The adulatory (as apart from the matrimonial) Sonnets to the patron are only occasionally—as in the case of some of those spoken of above as the "Time" Sonnets—conceivable as written for others to present, though they are frequently open to suspicion as non-Shakespearean.

5. A number of the serious and other Sonnets ostensibly addressed to the patron (No. 26, for certain) are likewise not referable to an "impersonal" motive.

6. The same holds of a number of Sonnets which we have seen to be probably addressed to a woman, or to different women.

There is, however, once more possibility which has not, I think, been thus far suggested—namely, that some of the Sonnets in the Quarto may have been originally *intended for inclusion in plays*. Whether or not all the non-dialogue Sonnets in LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST are genuine, they stand for a practice which Shakespeare at the time accepted, to the extent of letting pass the inappropriate pre-Shakespearean sonnet in ALL'S WELL. He may, then, have written other sonnets for inclusion in plays, and finally decided, in virtue of his ripening judgment, not so to use them, though giving copies to a friend or friends. And it is conceivable that a number of the enigmatic Sonnets, such as 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, or perhaps 46-7, 57-8, or 67-8, were so written.

I cannot profess to find any of them signally fitting for any situations in the Folio Plays; though I can conceive of some as fitting into THE TWO GENTLEMEN or ALL'S WELL, and it might be worth while to examine the speculative possibilities. But it is not very unlikely that Shakespeare should at times have handled play-plans which he did not carry out; and some of the Sonnets which constitute the enigma of the treacherous friend and the false mistress might conceivably have been composed under such circumstances. It is true, certainly, that the Sonnets in question form such

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an unsatisfactory and such an unfinished episode that they are not reasonably to be regarded as concocted for mere sonnet-purposes. But such a play-motive as has been suggested would be another matter; and in that case the unfinished character of the episode would be involved in the hypothesis. It certainly remains difficult to understand why the poet should in his own person write Sonnets of reproach at once to the false friend and to the false mistress, in both cases blending facile forgiveness with resentment, and putting both sets at the mercy of copyists. A play-plan *might* give occasion to them.

Such a hypothesis, of course, could cover only a minority of the Sonnets. To dozens of them it obviously could not apply at all. But when a few dozens are classed as either personal or "commissioned," and a large number more as in their nature useless for dramatic purposes, there will remain Sonnets enough which arouse doubt alternately as to their genuineness and as to their sincerity; and on these the "impersonal" theory, if only it be applied with discrimination, will have a right to flourish. Its roots lie partly in the artificiality alike of the theme and the treatment of a number of Sonnets which have the *cantabile* quality that broadly belongs to the bulk of the Quarto Sonnets in a degree not found in any other Elizabethan collections.

It is not for nothing that the hypothesis of "poetical exercises" has so constantly recurred in discussion of the Sonnets down to the present day. It has evidently been by many independently reached; and the jesting allusions in the Plays to sonneteering in general—though these too, being dramatic, give no solid ground for supposing the poet to be uttering his own thought—at least give the theory colour. Applied loosely and generally, it cannot be justified, inasmuch as so many of the Sonnets individually repel it, and so

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many of those which we have been contemplating as possibly written *for* others are not well described by the term "exercises," though that can properly pass as a description of the first seventeen. Considered as "dramatic" Sonnets, those in question are describable as fine expressions of impersonal feeling by the master dramatist; and even the detection in them of the concrete reminiscences of Sidney and others which have been so often pointed out by the commentators does not reduce them to the level of merely conventional things. Real beauty, which implies artistic sincerity, transcends any such reproach.

To many of the "patron" Sonnets, on the other hand, and to some others, the charge of conventionality is attachable because they cannot set up the impression of sincerity. Thus, as against the indiscriminate ascription of "personal" import to the great majority, there is an irreducible case for an application of the "impersonal" theory to a considerable number, even if the "play" theory be rejected. It is certainly indemonstrable. But it is at least better worth consideration than the "esoteric" theories which, like the "impersonal," partly proceed upon a sense of something elusive in the personality that seems to flit before us in the Quarto. The nugatoriness of esoteric solutions as such is sufficiently revealed in those which view the great tragedies as allegories of historic processes and episodes, thus reducing high imaginative creation to futile preachment, and poetic reality to prose platitude. A true perception of dramatic art as such would cancel all such hypotheses, whether or not it encouraged a surmise of some purely dramatic work in the Sonnets.

CHAPTER VII

PROBLEMS OF AUTHENTICITY

§ 1.

Sonnets 129, 81, 79, 83, 84, 99.

OF the many issues raised in our inquiry not the least stubborn, we have seen,¹ is that of the poetic quality of a number of the Sonnets, separately considered. It is fitting to approach it anew, apart from that of destination, with which, however, it is interlaced. It is one thing to say that Shakespeare is easily the finest of the Elizabethan sonneteers: it is another to determine what percentage of the Sonnets gives him his supremacy. When Professor Mackail writes that "Beside them the whole of that mass of Elizabethan sonnet-literature of which they are the crown grows pale, mannered, and thin. Here *all* is at a higher power, . . ." we must either understand him to be thinking only of mass effects, and of the bad sonneteers, or demur to the verdict. Nothing can really make "pale, mannered, and thin" such a sonnet as Sidney's

Leave me, O Love, that reachest but to dust ;

which, with one or two of Drayton's, and perhaps one of Daniel's, would have passed muster extremely well in the Thorpe Quarto. And many of the Quarto Sonnets, surely, are on no very high plane.

Of no critic would the judgment more promptly give me pause, if given against me on a point of poetry, than would Professor Mackail's. He has been the first, I think, to challenge explicitly the authenticity of the "Will" sonnets; and that is one of many services

¹ See above, in this Part, Ch. V, § 2.

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by him to criticism. These Sonnets cannot have been in his mind when he wrote that "here all is at a higher power." Yet when I find him deciding that Sonnets 129, 140, 146, "are unmistakeable Shakespeare and in Shakespeare's finest manner," after the most intent pause I remain unconvinced as to Sonnet 129. That this Sonnet is "the greatest in the world" was the verdict of Theodore Watts, loyally acquiesced in, in 1885, by William Sharp, then the disciple of Watts and his group. Some of us could never acquiesce. Putting aside, as rather ethico-pathological than æsthetic (though not therefore quite irrelevant), the highly neurasthenic character of the thesis, I do not find here either a Shakespearean diction or a Shakespearean rhythm. The lines

Is perjured, murderous, bloody, *full of blame*,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, *not to trust*,

are for me examples of what Shakespeare does *not* do when near the height of his power, which for Professor Mackail is the period of these Sonnets. Each of the cited lines trails off in verbal impotence. We have two sets of epithets, setting out violently and volubly, and seeking to sustain their violence without regard to psychic fitness, yet collapsing in signally feeble phrases, framed anyhow to eke out the lines. The violence recurs, to the damage of the argument, as in "Past reason hated"; and the collapse recurs when "a very woe" fades into "a dream" for the rhyme's sake, as has happened with the previous descent of "in possession *so*." Throughout, the rhythm is staccato, percussive, charmless; and only the opening clause and the concluding couplet give the piece an air of force. I can well believe it to be from another hand than Shakespeare's. It is surely not in "his finest manner." As the evident product of a neurotic person, it might speculatively be assigned to Chapman,

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and when we find its very thesis in two couplets of his portion of *HERO AND LEANDER* (Third Sestiad, ll. 33-4, 367-8)—

That unblestèd blessing
Which for lust's plague doth perish with possessing ;

Too true it is that, when 'tis gone, men hate
The joy as vain they took in love's estate

—such an ascription becomes plausible. The un-Shakespearean opening phrase “expense of spirit,” as it happens, is a form of metaphor many times used by Chapman: *e.g.*, “expense of care” (*Od.* xiii, 404); “spirit-spent blood” (*Id.*, *ib.*, 58); “th’ expense of both their bloods” (*Id.*, xiv, 367); “his life’s expense” (*Id.*, xv, 302); “th’ expense of thy life’s date” (*Id.* *ib.*, 650); “the foul expense Both of their fames and bloods” (*Id.*, xvii, 583); “much *spirit* spent” (*Id.*, xviii, 270); “spend their souls in sparks” (Verses to Harriots); “sacred expense of his time” (pref. to trans. of *Iliad*: *cf.* Epist. ded. of 1598). The formula, it is true, was common,¹ Spenser setting the fashion with “spent his vital spirit” (*RUINS OF TIME*, l. 382); but no Elizabethan uses it so often as Chapman. And the fact that yet a third passage in the third Sestiad of *HERO AND LEANDER* points to yet another Sonnet² is a further ground for seriously considering the point.

And the trouble recurs when we go back a page and note Professor Mackail’s praise of Sonnet 81, where, he says, “the promise of immortality which [the poet] gives is too splendid to be insincere; it is no mere flourish of rhetoric but the authentic and inspired voice of poetry, which sounds in these noble lines:

*Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die :
The earth can yield me but a common grave
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.*

¹ See *The Baconian Heresy*, p. 457.

² See above, p. 194.

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Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read ;
And tongues *to be* your *being* shall rehearse
When all the *breathers* of the world *are dead*.

The italics, of course, are mine; and I use them again in adding the four opening lines and the two last, which are not given in the quotation:

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth *am rotten*.
From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although *in me* each *part* will be forgotten.

You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—
Where breath most breathes, even in the *mouths* of men.

Is that really good diction and inspired poetry? Is "From hence your memory death cannot take" a Shakespearean rhythm? Are the two uses of "from hence," or is either of them, felicitous? And are those phrases, "your being shall rehearse," and "where breath most breathes," any better? Putting aside, finally, the whole question of technique, what cogitable sign of special "sincerity" is there in the assertion about "your name" when, as in a hundred cases of the kind, no name is given? What is the difference, as to sincerity, between this and the hundred and one uses by others of the same *cliché*? Had that Sonnet stood alone to Shakespeare's name, would there be any thought of its eclipsing the other sonneteers of the time? Let me note that so orthodox an editor and so cultured a critic as Dean Beeching pronounces the theme "conventional," and my challenge will perhaps appear not too presumptuous.

When we put the further question, How is this Sonnet to be reconciled with No. 73 on the assumption, made by Professor Mackail, that all of the first 126 are addressed to one person? we have a still more urgent

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reason for raising the issue either of authorship or of personality. The seventy-third Sonnet, by common consent one of the finest of all, tells the recipient that the writer (or the "speaker") *must* soon pass away from him: the eighty-first puts the death of either as an even chance. Either, then, 73 is written for another to present, or 81 is from another pen, or addressed to another person. But even the last hypothesis will not help unless we adopt the first; and if we can go so far as that, are we rashly sceptical or are we simply reasonable when we challenge the Shakespearean authorship of 81?

It seems the more reasonable when we turn to 82, where, with a better execution, we have such a different burden. This also seems addressed to the patron, for the apostrophic "love," here as so often elsewhere, is to be held as signifying "friend" in the modern force. The tone is not pressingly intimate; there is no eternising; there is a protest that, as against the "strained touches rhetoric can lend,"

Thou truly fair wert truly sympathised
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend;
And their gross painting might be better used
Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abus'd.

And in 83, in a poorer strain, we have that tone continued. The poet, declaring the recipient's attractions to be such as make praise unnecessary, explains that "therefore have I slept in your report"; and notes that the patron has complained of it:

This silence for my sin you did impute.

There is here no strain of passionate friendship, despite the Elizabethan touches of "beauty" and "fair eyes." But there is the definite mention of "both your poets"; and when we consider 84, which suggests the same attitude and the same pen, we are moved to inquire

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whether the second poet's praises may not have been included in the album or transcript which came into the hands of Thorpe. But it is hardly possible to pretend to trace, save in 81 and in one other, a clearly marked second hand in the series of Sonnets from 78, which raises the question of rival poets, to 86, which puts it most concretely. We have all been accustomed, whatever theory we might prefer, to hear Shakespeare's voice in 85 and 86; and though 83 and 84 have a distinctly inferior rhythm, and a more commonplace diction than that of 82, they are in much the same key. Save for 81, and for the excessive flattery, the apparent malice, and the cheap conceits of 79, which give it such an unpleasant flavour, the Sonnets of the series seem broadly to consist in purport if not in quality; though 84, with its lavish panegyric, and its very bad line,

Lean penury within that pen doth dwell,

again sounds less worthily, but for the thirteenth line, which carries a rebuke. Certainly 83 and 84 might be from another poet than he who penned 92; but it is not easy to be sure of it.

Is 79, then, detachable, with 81, from the rest? We must, of course, test by literary quality, not by worthiness of tone. After Lee has pronounced that "The sole biographical inference deducible from the Sonnets is that at one time Shakespeare disdained no weapon of flattery in an endeavour to monopolise the bountiful patronage of a young man of rank,"¹ we must speak by the card. But if we recognise *any* of the Sonnets as being open to challenge on the point of authenticity, we are bound to raise the question where

¹ *Life*, ed. 1899, p. 159. In the edition of 1915, p. 230, the passage becomes: "The sole biographical inference which is deducible *with full confidence* is that at one time in his career Shakespeare, *like the majority of his craft*, disdained *few* weapons of flattery," etc.

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there are some special grounds for thinking that alien work may be present.

Such grounds we have seen in 81 considered simply as poetic panegyric. In 79 we have at once sickly panegyric and (apparently) envious disparagement of a rival, notably dissonant with the magnanimous praise of Sonnet 80, and all poorly, not to say fatuously, expressed. Compared with 78, and still more with 80, No. 79 is on the face of it a spiteful whine,¹ putting a silly argument, which would stultify any panegyric whatever. To say that when A praises B for virtue and beauty he has stolen these attributes from B to give him them again, is to formulate an imbecility not to be matched in these or any other Sonnets. If it were put with any force or felicity of phrase as distinguished from idea, we might feel compelled to suspect that Shakespeare penned it "on a bad day"; but there is not a line that rises above commonplace, and few that do not sink below it. "He lends thee virtue, and he *stole* that *word* From thy behaviour" is certainly not commonplace: it is nearly the silliest fustian in Elizabethan verse.

Mr. Forrest, strangely enough, ascribes 79, with 78, to Shakespeare, giving the greatly superior 80th Sonnet to Barnes. It is a sad instance of the snares of theory; for if Mr. Forrest had simply followed the highly eclectic taste which at his outset moved him to pronounce most of the Sonnets too poor for Shakespeare he must infallibly have banned 79. But, unhappily, that puts him in a position to say that it is written *at* Barnes, who in his dedicatory sonnet to Southampton had spoken of "thy virtues." Even on that view, a critic not theory-ridden might have reflected that some other rival poet than Shakespeare might at this

¹ Professor Alden argues that the Sonnet is perfectly compatible with friendly relations between the two poets. A more satisfactory solution, it is hoped, is offered below.

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point have intervened. But the saddest thing of all, for Mr. Forrest's theory, is that the Sonnet may quite reasonably be assigned to Barnes, as being—strange though at first sight the suggestion may seem—really quite compatible with his dedicatory sonnet of 1593.¹

For, if we consider the matter carefully, Sonnet 79, were it written by a rival of Barnes, would be too foolishly spiteful to serve any purpose. Any patron would detect and resent the meanness as well as the fatuity of such an attack, which would thus recoil on the writer. If Shakespeare were meanly envious enough to wish to do his rival harm, he at least could not have been fool enough to suppose that such back-biting would serve his purpose. Neither Lee nor any critic not "anti-Stratfordian," probably, would dispute his insight into human nature. Sonnet 79, in fact, is intelligible only as having been written by Barnes himself, fatuously capping his former compliments.

He, and he alone, who had written of the patron's "virtues" and "those heavenly lamps" his eyes, could proceed to say that "thy poet" had only robbed the illustrious one of his attributes to render them again. This argument will remain valid even if it should be found that another poet than Barnes had written a similar dedication, and had later written Sonnet 79. The point is that no poet in his senses would have written it *at* another. But, as it happens, there are internal grounds for ascribing it to Barnes. We have already seen,² at least, reason to impute to him, as does Mr. Forrest, the fifteen-line Sonnet, No. 99, with its

¹ I have not gone into the biography of Barnes, which has been made much of by Mr. Acheson and Dr. Creighton. But the reader who is interested in his personality will find various details in Mr. Acheson's *Shakespeare's Sonnet Story*.

² Above, pp. 85-7.

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rank praise and its poverty of phrase; and 79 rather closely parallels that in method. In 79 the praised person has all beauty and virtue, and the praising poet can but steal them to give again. In 99 the praised person (presumably a woman) possesses all beauty; and all the flowers must have stolen theirs from her. In his *PARTHENOPHIL* sonnet (64) Barnes makes the cruel fair get her charms by robbing the celestials. It seems to be "Barnes his mark." How could Mr. Forrest miss it in No. 79?

As against the denial of 99 to Shakespeare, it may be argued that it connects with 98. Craig, following Tyler and a dozen other editors, makes that end with a colon, not with a period, thus making 99 a continuation; but that is not warranted by the purport. The second, indeed, may have been suggested by the first; may have been an effort to cap it; but its development of "you pattern of all those" is a mere inflation of a passable if conventional compliment into a vacuous hyperbole. If both were by one hand, we should have to pronounce the poet so far infatuated by a fair success as to spoil it. But to turn "the sweet smell" into "thy sweet that smells" is much more likely to have been the exploit of an imitator, whose plentiful lack of judgment is revealed by every line of his sonnet. Thus the dictum of Professor Tucker (*Introd.*, viii) that Sonnets 88 and 89 are "closely and unmistakably united" (though he does not in his own edition join them by a colon) is seen to be fallacious as an assertion of authorship even if it were justified by the purport.

§ 2.

Sonnets 78-80, 82-7. The Rival Poet.

In studying Sonnet 79 we come in general contact with the problem of the rival poet, which has been discussed both incidentally and in connection with

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general theories of the Sonnets ever since Malone suggested Spenser as the rival most likely to be regarded as formidable by the young Shakespeare. In our survey of sonnet-study in general these discussions have been only occasionally glanced at, the problem, as usually handled, being external to the main debate. It comes properly under special notice when we are examining all round the Sonnets concerned. And for the present writer, who dealt with it a number of years ago without raising any question of authenticity as to the Sonnets in question, that issue to a certain extent affects his former arguments.

On a number of the suggestions which have been made as to the identity of the rival poet, debate may now be spared. There being nothing concrete to connect Spenser with Southampton and Shakespeare, his name has practically dropped out. Marlowe, suggested by Massey and Mackay, is equally ineligible: if we are to date Sonnets 78-80, 82-6 before the middle of 1593, it is hard to see how some of those preceding are to be placed; and in his case, again, there are no concrete clues whatever. Ben Jonson, Watson, Griffin, and others who have been eccentrically suggested, equally offer no foothold. Nashe, though devoted to Southampton as patron, does not enter our field of survey as a poet.¹ Five names only give ground for a serious investigation: they are Daniel, Drayton, Gervase Markham, and Chapman, considered as possible rival poets; and Barnabe Barnes, in respect of his known connection with Southampton.

At the outset we have to remember that though

¹ Lee asserts (*Life*, ed. 1915, p. 200) that Nashe addressed to Southampton "many affectionately phrased sonnets." This is an unwarranted statement. Only three sonnets by Nashe are known: that at the end of *Pierce Penilesse*, which Mr. McKerrow justifiably holds to have been addressed to Lord Derby; and the two in *A Choice of Valentines*, which the same high authority holds to have been addressed to Lord Strange.

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one poet is presented (80, 86) as the rival *par excellence*, Sonnet 78, in the lines,

As every alien pen hath got my use,
And under thee their poesy disperse,

and those which follow, expressly alludes to a number of competitors. Of the poets above named, then, several may be in the writer's view. But the only issue worth debating is that of the identity of the rival who is, on the whole, so respectfully indicated in 80 and 86.

That *that* poet should have been identified by Lee with Barnabe Barnes is one of the outstanding oddities of the debate. Making the identification with confidence, Lee writes¹ that Shakespeare "detected a touch of magic in the man's writing"; whereupon we can but echo Professor Alden's comment that "if he did, 'the less Shakespeare he.'" Lee's sole grounds were (1) the allusions of Barnes, in his dedicatory sonnet, to the patron's eyes and virtues, and his own ambition "by flight to rise" to a height worthy of the latter; (2) Barnes's description of his own pieces as "hymns"; (3) Barnes's phrase (PARTHENOPHIL, Son. 91) "My fancy's ship . . . still floats"—comparing with Shakespeare's "My saucy bark," etc. (Son. 80); (4) the parallel between the "distilled from limbecks" passage in No. 119 and Barnes's line,

From my love's limbeck still distilled tears;

and (5) Barnes's allusions to his mistress's "wills." All this is as naught in support of the thesis that Shakespeare held Barnes to be a formidable rival.

That Barnes does connect with the "rival poet" Sonnets we have seen reason to believe in our analysis of 79. Is there, then, any further connection? Mr. Forrest ascribes to him both 80 and 86, turning to the account of his theory Lee's notation of the "saucy

¹ *Life*, ed. 1898, p. 131; ed., 1915, p. 201.

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bark " parallel. With this thesis we may collate that of Mr. George Stronach,¹ who, also proceeding on Lee, had previously argued to the effect that Barnes wrote 86, noting how the phrase "your countenance" occurs both in that and in Barnes's dedicatory sonnet. On both heads the answer is that 80 and 86 are much above the level of Barnes in point of force and phrase and burden, while 79 *is* on his common level in point of general fatuity. Stronach, by pronouncing the one good sonnet in PARTHENOPHIL (66) "thoroughly Shakespearean," appears to imply that Barnes could rise to the Shakespearean level; but he rather rouses the wonder whether that solitary success may have been contributed by Shakespeare or another.

On the view of Mr. Stronach and Mr. Forrest, Barnes speaks respectfully of Shakespeare as having eclipsed him by the "proud full sail of his great verse"; but both entirely fail to meet the question, On what grounds could Barnes have spoken of Shakespeare as having "comeers by night" and

that affable familiar ghost
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence—?

Mr. Stronach's attempt to meet the difficulty is simply negligible in comparison with the case that has been made out for identifying the rival poet with Chapman—Shakespeare being assumed to be the sonnet-writer. Admittedly, this identification, first mooted by Minto, is the most impressive that has yet been advanced; but it has been objected to not only by supporters of other theories, as Lee, but by impartial editors, as Mr. Pooler; and Professor Alden has summed up that "On the whole, the Chapman theory, while it is far from having been shown to be impossible, has been accepted with decidedly uncritical assurance. . . . For the present, at any rate, Dowden's conclusion must

¹ *Notes and Queries*, August 22, 1903, p. 142.

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stand: 'In the end, we are forced to confess that the [rival] poet remains as dim a figure as the patron.' "

To this, however, it must be answered (1) that alike the authenticity of the mass of the Sonnets and the destination of the great majority to one man have been accepted by Dowden and others "with decidedly uncritical assurance"; (2) that "the patron" is to a considerable extent quite clearly identifiable with Southampton; and that we may just as reasonably seek to identify the rival poet as to discriminate in matters of authenticity and destination. And the latter inquiries must be made if we are to do any searching criticism at all.

It is fitting to note first the apparent possibilities in Daniel, Drayton, and Markham. I have elsewhere pointed out that the claim for Daniel, who was one of the most notable sonneteers of the early nineties, might be supported by his lines in *MUSOPHILUS* (976-8):

The speech of heaven with whom they have commèrce,
That only seems out of themselves removed,
And do with more than human skills converse.

Here is a suggestion of the heavenly "familiar" of Sonnet 86; and Daniel's connection with Southampton is established by the poetic Epistle which he sent to the Earl on his release at the accession of James. But *MUSOPHILUS* was published only in 1603; and at that date we cannot conceive Shakespeare as being perturbed by mere fears of a rival poet. Those sonnets emphatically call for a dating not later than 1596, and are well compatible with an earlier.

Drayton's *LEGENDS* of Gaveston, Matilda, and Robert of Normandy, and his *MORTIMERIADOS*, on the other hand, appeared in 1594-6; and these might be spoken of as exhibiting "proud full sail" in "great verse"; but Drayton in turn offers no ground for the allusions to the "affable familiar ghost." The strongest ground

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for bringing him in is a line in one of his dedicatory sonnets to the Countess of Bedford,

Upon whose *praise* my soul shall *spend her powers*,

which distinctly recalls the lines in Sonnet 80:

A better spirit doth use your name
And in the *praise* thereof *spends all his might*.

But there is no trace of any praise of Southampton by Drayton. Fleay, after wasting time on Gabriel Harvey and Nashe, refers¹ to a "suppressed" sonnet by Drayton to "L. S.," which might be to Southampton, and would suffice to establish Drayton as the rival poet; but even that sonnet is not in evidence.

Markham certainly addressed a dedicatory sonnet to Southampton in which, like Barnes, he speaks of the "eye" and the "virtue" of the patron; and it has been assumed by Mr. Acheson that the line

Whose eye doth crown the most victorious pen

is a friendly allusion to Shakespeare, though the meaning seems to be simply that the most victorious pen may be regarded as crowned when this patron approves. But while Markham may have been one of the "alien pens" of Sonnet 78, it is critically impossible either to associate him with "proud full sail of his great verse" or to connect him with a "spirit, by spirits taught to write Above a mortal pitch."

The reason for the common preference given to Chapman as chief "rival poet" is that he at most points *does* fit the descriptions in Sonnets 80 and 86. The chief objection thus far made is that the "proud full sail of his great verse" can be said to begin only in 1598, with the issue of the first portion of his translation of the *ILIAD*. But, in the first place, the cited phrase might quite as well be applied to the style of his *SHADOW OF NIGHT* (1594) divided into two "Hymns,"

¹ *Biog. Chron.*, ii, 219.

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or of his OVID'S BANQUET (1595), as to any other verse by any possible rival poet above named; and, in the second place, it is in a high degree likely that portions of Chapman's ILIAD were in circulation in MS. as early as 1594. In tracing the evidence that points to him as "taught by spirits to write" we shall have to examine his continuation of Marlowe's HERO AND LEANDER; and the beginnings of *that* performance, which is not unlikely to have been started even as early as 1593,¹ may also have been known to Southampton's circle, and might very well in turn be regarded as carrying "proud full sail."

First let us trace the clues to

that affable familiar ghost
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence—

the one disparaging passage in Sonnet 86. The direct objections to the identification turn on Minto's citation of the prose dedication to THE SHADOW OF NIGHT. It is argued that the phrase as to Skill yielding her secrets, "not without having drops of their souls like an heavenly familiar," has reference only to a common superstition about familiar spirits. But that is only one of Minto's first clues. The main strength of the Chapman clues lies elsewhere.

1. Minto's best point had reference to the "compeers by night" of Sonnet 86. In THE SHADOW OF NIGHT we have the appeal:

All you possessed with indepressèd spirits²
Endued with nimble and aspiring wits,
Come consecrate with me to sacred Night
Your whole endeavours, and detest the light.

That clue is not dismissible like the other, which in any case is corroborative.

¹ The disrupted character of his first pages suggests that he made some false starts.

² Note the forced rhyme-stress, in connection with the discussion above, pp. 193-4.

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2. But Minto did not trace all the clues. In the epilogue to his translation of the *ILIAD*, Chapman writes of "that most assistful and unspeakable Spirit by whose thrice sacred conduct and inspiration I have finished that labour."

3. In the epistle dedicatory to his continuation of *HERO AND LEANDER* he speaks of himself as "drawn by *strange instigation* to employ some of my serious time in so trifling a subject"; and in his first sestiad (the third of the poem) he breaks off to sing:

Then ho, most strangely intellectual fire,
That, proper to my soul, hast power t' inspire
Her burning faculties, and with the wings
Of thy unspherèd flame *visit'st the springs*
Of spirits immortal. Now (as swift as Time
Doth follow Motion) find th' eternal clime
Of his¹ free soul, whose living subject stood
Up to the chin in the Pierian flood. . . .
Confer with it, and make my pledge as deep
That neither's draught is consecrate to sleep:
Tell it how much his late desires I tender
(If yet it know not) and *to light surrender*
My soul's dark offspring, willing it should die
To loves, to passions, and society.

The meaning of this is that Chapman has just published (1594) his *SHADOW OF NIGHT*, as Marlowe had (before the middle of 1593) urged him to do; and that he adjures his "strange" communicant, who visits the springs of spirits immortal, to carry to Marlowe that message.

4. In the *Inductio* to his later poem (1609) *THE TEARS OF PEACE*, he speaks of his colloquy with the spirit of Homer, in which

"I am," said he, "that spirit Elysian
That in thy native air, and on the hill
Next Hitchin's left hand, did thy bosom fill
With such a flood of soul, that thou wert fain,

¹ *I.e.*, Marlowe's.

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With exclamations of her rapture then,
To vent it to the echoes of the vale ;
When, meditating of me, a sweet gale
Brought me upon thee ; and thou did'st inherit
My true sense, for the time then, in my spirit,
And I, invisibly, went prompting thee
To those fair greens where thou did'st English me.

Again the meaning seems unmistakeable. Chapman had begun his translation of Homer in his "native air," "on the hill next Hitchin's left hand"—that is, before he settled in London—and he was at the outset convinced that Homer played for him the part of a heavenly familiar. That he should *talk* to this effect among his London intimates, of whom Marlowe had been one, is extremely probable.

5. The Sonnet lines

Was it his spirit, *by spirits taught* to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead ?

are fitly to be interpreted as having reference to such talk, though the passage cited from *HERO AND LEANDER* might suffice to account for it. When we find in *SIR GILES GOOSECAP* (I, iv, 24) the line

And far above the pitch of my low plumes,

and again in the later version (1609) of Book II of the *Iliad*, 419-21, the phrase "a pitch above All mortal powers," the inference that such expression was common in Chapman's talk is strengthened. Some such claim is the keynote of *THE SHADOW OF NIGHT*, where, near the end, we have the lines:

And that mind most is beautiful and high,
And nearest comes to a Divinity,
That furthest is from spot of Earth's delight.

Such an accumulation of clues would perhaps serve to

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convince most commentators were it not for the fact that the Sonnet lines

A better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,

have not so far been proved to be applicable to Chapman. Mr. Acheson, who has indicated so many points of connection between Shakespeare and Chapman, has unfortunately taken it for granted that all the Quarto Sonnets must be Shakespeare's, and thus traces the scent always in one direction. Assuming, justifiably enough, that Chapman sought Southampton's patronage at an early stage and failed to obtain it, he argues:¹ "That he [Chapman] was unsuccessful in both attempts we are assured from the fact that his *dedications* to Southampton, *which Shakespeare mentions* in certain of his Sonnets, never saw print." Obviously no scrupulous scholar can accept such an argument; and Lee has claimed that the conventional formality of Chapman's (much later) dedicatory sonnet to Southampton, placed with many others in the complete Homer translation (1615), discredits the theory of any previous connection between them.

On reflection it will be seen that it does not. The frustration of early hopes on Chapman's part is perfectly compatible with a distant address long afterwards, when Southampton is made one of a large group of dignitaries who are invoked for patronage. But it is not permissible to assume that Chapman *must* have written early dedications which were rejected. If we will but follow certain clues which Mr. Acheson has noted, but to which he "hunts counter," we shall find a better solution. In Sonnet 69 we have the bad line:

All tongues, the voice of souls, give thee that due ;

¹ *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*, p. 117. (Arguments reproduced in *Shakespeare's Sonnet Story*, 1922.)

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and in OVID'S BANQUET is the line:

Alas, why lent not heaven the soul a tongue.

In the same Sonnet, again, we have:

By seeing further than the eye hath shown,
They look into the beauty of thy mind ;

and in Chapman's sonnet-series A CORONET FOR HIS MISTRESS PHILOSOPHY comes this:

Your eyes were never yet let in to see
The majesty and riches of the mind.

Mr. Acheson must have it that the Quarto Sonnet is a retort upon Chapman's. But why not try the natural surmise that the Quarto Sonnet *is written by Chapman* ? Found in Chapman's works, it would be seen to have that elliptic structure of phrase and that wingless rhythm which so often mark his verse, by reason of his frequent forensic purpose and temper. It is, in fact, just such a piece of versification as the couplet-writing Chapman would be likely to produce if he attempted such a sonnet.

§ 3. *Chapman Sonnets* (?)

Nos. 69-70, 53-4, 81, 83, 84, 87, 125.

This is not in the least an arbitrary hypothesis. Professor Alden notes that Sonnet 70 "has awakened discussion chiefly through its apparent inconsistency with others commonly taken as addressed to the same person." The inconsistency is not merely apparent, it is irreducible. Here the recipient, clearly a male, is told that

Thou present'st a pure unstained prime.
Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,
Either not assailed, or victor being charged—

this after such Sonnets of reproach as 33, 34, 40, 41, 42.

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Mr. Acheson's resource is, with Rolfe, to make 70 antedate these; others argue that the offences are forgotten as being forgiven; Gervinus achieves the feat of finding in 70 an unhappy disclosure of jealousy; Lee seems to see no difficulty at all; others suggest, more candidly, different recipients. But the first step of criticism should be to inquire whether this Sonnet is from the same hand; and when, joining it with 69, with which it connects in burden, we scrutinise the diction of both, we find so many reasons for doubt as to compel a denial. Sonnet 69 begins in a flagrantly un-Shakespearean fashion:

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
Want nothing that the *thought of hearts* can mend;
All tongues (*the voice of souls*) give thee that due;

and the argument of lines 8-12 is so confused that it defies interpretation:

By seeing farther than the eye hath shown¹
They look into the beauty of thy mind,
And that, in guess, they measure by *thy deeds*;
Then (churls) their thoughts, although their eyes were kind,
To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds.

To the proposed emendation "*their* deeds," Craig replies that it is needless, though he reads "Thy outward" in line 5, where Q. has "their outward." Then, as Beeching notes, the overlookers are churls in that they measure a man's mind by his deeds. Be it either way, the Sonnet is a compound of crooked reasoning, cramped diction, and unmusical versification, as like Chapman as it is unlike Shakespeare.

And Sonnet 70 has several of the same aspects. *Cantabile* quality can be predicated of neither. The

¹ Here most edd. put a period, surely without good reason. The "by seeing" cannot be construed with the preceding line:

In other *accents* do thy praise confound.

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phrasing is constantly infelicitous as mere statement; the figure of Suspicion, the "ornament" of beauty, flying as "a crow in heaven's sweetest air," is quite the worst trope in the Quarto; the further identification of false suspicion with the "canker *vice*" which loves "the sweetest buds" is something worse than a mixture of metaphors; and the conclusion is a mere anticlimax. We have noted a certain number of Sonnets which by sheer ineptitude deny Shakespeare's authorship: this combines ineptitude with a forcible-feeble distortion of idea. And to a reader of Chapman the stumbling lines

So thou be good, slander doth but approve
Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time,

recall him as they recall no other poet of the period. I have given elsewhere,¹ in illustration of some of his matter in *ALL'S WELL*, a number of instances of just such broken rhythm, in ethical predications just as unintelligibly involved.

Either such work must be admitted to be presumably non-Shakespearean or the wholesale ascription of rhythmic beauty to the Sonnets must be flatly challenged as false criticism. These two Sonnets have beauty neither in rhythm nor in purport, phrase, or thought. It does not follow, of course, that the same pen will always exhibit the same movement. Chapman can be fluent as well as staccato: in his part of *HERO AND LEANDER* we find both jarring and musical lines: and he may have produced some of the adulatory Quarto Sonnets which run more easily. One could conceive him writing 53 or 54, 81 or 83 or 84, and, finally, 87, which is the second "farewell" in the Quarto, making us say, "Something too much of this." I have elsewhere pointed out, further, that in 125 the stumbling lines:

Or laid great bases for eternity
Which prove more short than waste or ruining

¹ *The Shakespeare Canon*, Part III, pp. 44, 45.

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correspond remarkably with those in SIR GILES GOOSECAP, v, ii, 105-7:

Do not make
Those *groundworks of eternity* you lay
Means to your *ruin* and *short being here*.

Drawing the conclusion that Chapman failed to hold Southampton after a good deal of trying, we can find in 87 a possible withdrawal on his part. But, without pressing the claim where it is less obviously justified, we may be content to say that Sonnets 69 and 70 are markedly in Chapman's manner, and that, with or without other matter of the kind, they suffice to account for a mention of him as "spending all his might" in the patron's praise.

And there are yet other reasons for supposing him to have made such an attempt. The CORONET FOR HIS MISTRESS PHILOSOPHY is pretty certainly directed against Shakespeare as one who in his poems figures as making merchandise of "Fame's loose feathers" and as "singing love's sensual empery"; and, as I have elsewhere pointed out, the concluding sonnet-stanza, with the subjoined *lucidius olim*, points to a reluctant modification of the thesis to placate a recalcitrant recipient. Certain allusions in the SHADOW OF NIGHT are also quite capable of interpretation as praises of Southampton; and the dedication of that poem, with its fling against "idolatrous platts for riches," and readers "hidebound with affection to great men's fancies," strikes the same notes; while the further reference to the peers who are praised by Roydon, the dedicatee, tells of a hungry hope of new patronage from "their true nobility, whose high deserving virtues may cause me hereafter strike . . . fire out of darkness." That Chapman had hoped to be able to dedicate his poem to Southampton; that he was denied because his his poem was unacceptable; that he had to fall back

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on his friend Matthew Roydon; and that he gave voice to his chagrin in that dedication, may be reckoned a reasonable hypothesis.

It may be objected that these inferences, which suggest the date 1594-5 for the episode of the rival poet, put it too early. But it must be remembered that the earliest Sonnets are reasonably dateable as early as 1591 or 1592, and that Sonnet 104 speaks of but three years of acquaintance. And it is precisely in that period that we can best imagine the young Shakespeare much concerned about keeping his patron's favour.

Thus restated and more fully justified, I am content to leave the thesis of Chapman's being the rival poet to take its chances as against the Barnes theory, or Mr. Forrest's hypothesis that Shakespeare is the rival poet attacked in 86, the assailant being Barnes. The argument that the sonnet-reference to "every hymn that able spirit affords" fits Barnes as well as Chapman seems to me weak, in that Barnes only incidentally speaks of his sonnets as hymns, as did other poets, whereas Chapman formally entitles the two sections of his *SHADOW OF NIGHT* 'Hymnus in Cynthia' and 'Hymnus in Noctem.' The further objection that Chapman could not be spoken of as producing "precious phrase by all the Muses filed," and hymns "in polished form of well-refined pen," is still less valid. The style of OVID's *BANQUET* would certainly pass as full of "precious phrase" with the connoisseurs of that day: the commendatory sonnets prefixed to the *BANQUET* tell as much; and Jonson, later, pronounced it one of Chapman's triumphs "to refine old Hesiod's ore"; while one panegyrist is found to assure him that

With unaffected style and sweetest strain
Thy unambitious pen keeps on her pace.

If there be no stronger negative arguments than these, the Chapman hypothesis should stand.

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§ 4. *Remaining Problems.*

Sonnets 128-152.

A number of other challenges, more or less confident, to the authenticity of given Sonnets have arisen in the course of our study of Problems of Destination; and the issues may be left as there raised. It remains to notice those of the same kind which arise in the lesser section of the Quarto, admitted to stand apart from the larger. The first query is set up by Sonnet 128, justly pronounced by Mr. Pooler "un-Shakespearean in sound and rhythm." We may go further and call it un-Shakespearean in diction and commonplace in feeling and phrasing. There will, doubtless, be resistance to the impeachment of 129, in the first section of this chapter; but one would suppose that at this time of day few will do serious battle for 128.

For that matter, there is little to be said for 130 and 131, which are in their diverging ways so different in tone from 132. The maxim as to the power of love to overthrow judgment should indeed withhold us from giving a verdict in terms of our nervous impression; still, neither of these strikes me as coming from the hand that wrote 140, or 144, or 148. But there is not the same stylistic ground for suspecting 133, 134 (though these too have doubtful aspects), and 137, which, further, point us back to 40-2. It is quite different, however, with 135, 136, and 143, which have not at all the Shakespearean rhythm and diction as we get them in 140, 144, 148. The "Will" sonnets, in fact, are among the feeblest things in the collection; and it is depressing to recall the confidence with which so many editors have founded on them a theory of the whole series. Poetically, they are worthless. But there are other tests—those of thought and judgment in style; and reasons have been offered

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in a previous section, in terms of those tests, for putting in serious doubt 142. In fact, doubt arises concerning a full half of the Sonnets in this tumultuous and motley section, of which 146 alone stands out as creating no critical or spiritual discontent in the sympathetic reader. We have a man's Sonnet answering accusations of lack of love, alongside of Sonnets bitterly or pathetically appealing for love from a woman declared unworthy; while in 151 we have a highly anomalous Sonnet, isolated in tone and purport from all the others, and introducing a grossness nowhere else to be found in the Quarto. That is on every ground open to challenge. No. 150, on the other hand, despite its faulty and probably corrupt opening line, ending in "powerful might" (query: *prideful*? *scornful*? *harmful*?), passes the palate of Mr. Forrest; and if we apply the test of general force, 152 ought to pass also.

Thus, dismissing 151 as particularly un-Shakespearean in rhythm after the two opening lines, and 153-4 as un-Shakespearean trifles which do but remind us of the miscellaneous character of the collection as a whole, we end on the note of discord and disruption, acknowledging the presence of Shakespeare in a number of Sonnets which must be classed as personal because we cannot conceive of their being otherwise. No citation of vituperative sonnets from French or Italian or English pens can remove the impression of personal utterance here, precisely where most of us would be willing to dismiss it if we could, or to infer non-authenticity if there were any evidence to urge. The tantalising and indemonstrable hypothesis that such sonnets may have been written for inclusion in a play cannot be called a solution.

On the other hand, a close and non-idolatrous study of the mass will probably set up so many misgivings as to inspiration and execution, so many qualms over

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flaccid and pleonaſtic lines and fantaſtic or fooliſh thoughts—this even in pieces not commonly ranked as trivial—that there muſt reſult either a dynamic ſuſpicion of the genuineness of a large number of the Sonnets or a ſtatic conviction that there are too many of them for continuity of excellence; and that Shakeſpeare's ſelf muſt flag on a ſcale of output which no one elſe in three hundred years has maintained at high levels. And perhaps that is not the worſt critical compromise that the caſe invites, though it is to be hoped it will not be indolently accepted. Thoſe who can get by heart the whole 154, as Butler did and as Mr. Mackail at one point ſeems to adviſe—at leaſt as regards ſome 148—muſt be in a ſomewhat torpidly happy ſtate, æſthetically ſpeaking. Shakeſpeare himſelf, one fears, would not commend them. Critics of good ſtanding have frequently proteſted that the proſecution of the “problems” has tended to divert readers from the primary and ultimate matter of the literary value of the Sonnets; and the proteſt is juſt. But ſome of thoſe very critics, it may be, have deflected critical ſtandards by indiſcriminate panegyric of a body of work which varies immensely in quality. Their taſk has been no more thoroughly handled than the other, though Profeſſor Tucker and others have made good contributions.

When a critic of the calibre of Mr. Verity finds *all* the Sonnets of high quality, and ſo cultured a taſte as Mr. Mackail's finds only “ſplendid” matter in Sonnets which lie open to definite charges of weak tautology, unhappy phraſing, and confused thinking, while a critic like Mr. Forreſt, certainly of keen literary ſenſe, finds in them ſome of his picked ſamples of “variegated vileneſs” of expreſſion, there is clear need for a critical ſearching of heart all round. Not that Mr. Forreſt, who can at times be very arbitrary in his reckoning of literary qualities, is to outweigh

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Mr. Mackail; but that all deliverances alike must be sifted.

I cannot agree with Mr. Forrest's verdict (p. 214) that all of the twenty-three Quarto Sonnets 41-63 are in point of rhythm, lucidity, felicity of phrase, fitness of metaphor, epigrammatic point, balance, and "restraint," "a good deal" below the standard of the twenty-four he has selected from Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Constable, Griffin, Barnes (two only, one being "*the*" one), and Peele (a poem curtailed). A number of the impeached Q. Sonnets are, I think, non-Shakespearean—54-6, for instance; and some I have described as within the reach of a cultivated amateur; yet a number more—59-60, for instance—seem to me to be outrageously ascribed by Mr. Forrest to men who could not have produced them; and a large number of those selected by Mr. Forrest from the prominent sonneteers of the time strike me as being marked by worse faults than are to be found in most of the impeached twenty-three. Had Mr. Forrest found in the Quarto such lines as:

Her brows shade frowns, although her eyes are sunny;
Her smiles are lightning, though her pride despair.

(*Daniel.*)

These plaintive verse, the posts of my desire,
Which haste for succour to her slow regard,
Bear not report of any slender fire,
Forging a grief, to win a fame's reward.

(*Daniel.*)

I find my griefs innumerable grow,
The reckonings rise to millions of despairs.

(*Drayton.*)

Care-charmer Sleep,¹ sweet ease in restless misery,
The captive's liberty, and his freedom's song,
Balm of the bruised heart,² Man's chief *felicity*,
Brother of quiet Death, when life is too, too long.

(*Griffin.*)

¹ Stolen from Daniel.

² Stolen from Sidney.

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Yet read at last the story of my woe,
The dreary abstracts of my endless cares,
With my life's sorrow interlined so,
Smoked with my sighs, and blotted with my tears.
The sad memorials of my miseries
Penned in the grief of mine afflicted ghost,
My life's complaint in doleful elegies. . . .

(*Drayton.*)

—he would have been tempted, I suspect, to add some of them to his samples of “variegated vileness” rather than to see in them epigrammatic point, balance, and restraint; and to point to the dull diction, the helpless iterations, the dismal droning and change-ringing, and the hurdy-gurdy rhythms of others, as permissible only to his minor poet. He cites from Spenser two sonnets which are hardly worth a second reading, though he has seen fit to cull two of Sidney's best. The matter is not thus to be disposed of. There is more ease of movement in half the Sonnets he impeaches than in two-thirds of those he sets above them. The average of singing quality in the Quarto Sonnets, in fact, is such that one is led to suspect that the writers even of the poorest had listened to Shakespeare. Mr. Forrest, of course, has his elastic competition-theory to account for a general levelling-up; but one remains sadly unconvinced.

The residual fact seems to be that all the higher performers have produced a number of charmless Sonnets, and the lesser men little else. That being so, we are driven once more to ask whether, if Shakespeare *had* written 154 Sonnets, a number of them would not be likely to be infelicitous? A number of stanzas in the poems, as aforesaid, point the moral. But it is after noting and stressing these facts, as against critics who ignore them, that I urge the countervailing considerations. The Sonnets are in their way as different a category from the Poems as are the Plays; and, like

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the Plays, they supply at once the motive and the opportunity for a truer art. The faults of the Poems are strictly to be described as purposive, deliberate conformities to the reigning public taste, for the sake of public and pecuniary success, not otherwise attainable. And when we find in the Sonnets on the one hand a new beauty of surprise, a new felicity of singing speech, and on the other hand a number of glaring blemishes, not explicable as conformities to public bad taste, but indicative only of sheer defect of poetic inspiration and craftsmanship, the only justifiable critical course, in the documentary circumstances, is to infer a variety of hands.

CHAPTER VIII

BUTLER'S THEORY

THE reason for examining Butler's theory is that, if it be ignored, those to whom it appeals will be encouraged to think it true. It may be well, then, to point out its absolute baselessness and, in respect of its conflict with the evidence at every point, its critical imbecility.

Hints of the kind, as we saw in our survey, were current before Butler; and it may have been that the quasi-cryptic essay of Oscar Wilde, which ostensibly was fictive rather than critical, moved the author of 'Erewhon' to a congenial undertaking. The thinker who had elaborated the theorem that the ODYSSEY was written by Nausicaa, and that the heroine, dwelling at a seaport, nevertheless did not know the stem of a ship from the stern,¹ was temperamentally fitted to expound the interpretation of the Shakespeare Sonnets as a record of homosexual vice.

The task is gone about, in large part, with a certain calculated moderation of manner, the complete theory being obtruded only at some points and at the conclusion, though the presentment of the Butlerian "Mr. W. H.," as above indicated, is calculated to dispel serious attention and to dismiss discussion at an early stage. That a fool and a knave, who probably was a sea-cook, of the name of William Hughes, not only bedevilled the soul of Shakespeare but was the cynosure of a number of "rival poets," is not a proposition fitted to invite examination. But Butler at the

¹ See Butler's translation of the *Odyssey*, note to B. ix, 482; and *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, 1897, pp. 9-10.

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close of his Introduction puts his doctrine with a due semblance of sad conviction :

Fresh from the study of the other great work in which the love that passeth the love of women is portrayed as nowhere else save in the Sonnets[!], I cannot but be struck with the fact that it is in the two greatest of all poets that we find this subject treated with the greatest intensity of feeling. The marvel, however, is this, that whereas the love of Achilles for Patroclus, depicted by the Greek poet, is purely English, absolutely without taint or alloy of any kind, the love of the English poet for Mr. W. H. was, though only for a short time, more Greek than English. I cannot explain this.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the deliberate falsification of the literary tradition as to Achilles and Patroclus in order to quash the impudent effort to impose as inevitable the Butlerian theory of the Sonnets. It is not even necessary to ask whether any critical conviction underlay the whole malodorous enterprise. Butler gives us a clue which, in the case of such a personality as his, suffices to account for his performance. By way of repelling Lee's assumption that the poet addresses his patron as a dependent, he writes:—

He declares himself to be his friend's vassal ; but what man who is as devotedly attached to another as Shakespeare evidently was to the worthless fellow whom he was addressing, does not hold himself the vassal of that friend, without for a moment considering himself as his dependent ? Indeed, I have known cases in which a friend has for years held himself the vassal of another whom he believed to be absolutely dependent upon him.¹

The reference is pretty certainly to Butler's own experience with his fraudulent friend Pauli, of which Mr. Festing Jones has preserved the record in his monumental memoir. It is, in Butler's own words, a "squalid, miserable story"² of a "white heat of devotion" on his part, and of protracted fraudulent

¹ Introduction, p. 51.

² *Samuel Butler : A Memoir*, 1919, ii, 286.

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pretence of indigence on the part of the other, whom Butler supplied with an income during a number of years in which the recipient was richer than the donor. It belonged to Butler's psychology to find comfort in the thought that if he had been infatuated by affection for a rogue, so, probably, had Shakespeare been.

Whatever the motivation, Butler's theory is exceptional among the exoteric as distinguished from the esoteric theories of the Sonnets in respect of its entire disregard of all plausibility in detail. The opening seventeen Sonnets, endlessly urging the recipient to marry, are by him treated as proofs of a *liaison* which would have excluded any such proceeding. Thereafter his tactic is to take advantage at every point of the uncritical orthodox assumption that the 126 Sonnets of the first section are all addressed to a male, and that all are written by Shakespeare.

It is a "document in madness" to note how the aberrations of orthodox editors and commentators induce counter-aberrations. As Malone's foolish surmise of a legal training undergone by Shakespeare went far to generate the Baconian theory, the mechanical insistence on uniformity of destination and authorship for the Sonnets gave Butler all the standing-ground he wanted for the thesis that their motivation was not one of ideal friendship. And so long as the canonical view of the Quarto is made to pass as that of sound scholarship, the Butler theory will hang on to it, however false be the pretence that the Elizabethan language of male friendship implies underlying vice.

All who know anything of Renaissance literature, or who have merely attended to the citations of Lee and others, are aware that male friendships in that age frequently took a highly romantic form; and that even in the seventeenth century grave and reverend writers could speak of a friendship between men as

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something loftier than any possible love between man and woman. Every student of Elizabethan literature knows that "lover" (or "love") and "friend" had then equivalent and interchangeable force, actual lovers, in our sense of the word, being "friends," and men calling themselves "lovers" of other men by way of saying "admirers"—as indeed we still do when we speak of ourselves as lovers of Shakespeare. "Sweet boy" is Greene's accost to Nashe from his death-bed; and "sweet" is so used in many plays. "To the memory of my beloved William Shakespeare" is the title of Ben Jonson's great poetic tribute in the Folio. Thus, even on the unwarrantable assumption that the 126 Sonnets are all addressed to a man, the inference which Butler professed to draw is a wanton imputation. But while Sonnet 20 is ascribed to Shakespeare, and such pieces as 23-5, 27-8, 39, 99 are stolidly affirmed to be addressed to a male, it will probably continue to find adherents who reckon themselves worldly-wise, and who spare themselves the trouble of checking it against the dozens of Sonnets which flatly negate their interpretation for the whole series.

They will found on Sonnets like 39, either ignoring 40, or professing, with Butler, to see in that nothing incompatible with his theory. Concerning 33-4 he took the simple strategic course of assuming (pp. 70-2) that it *must* refer to an episode such as his theory demanded, when all the connecting Sonnets, in both sections, indicate an episode of a totally different nature. At the same time we are assured that while "Mr. W. H." was guilty of gross and infamous black-guardism, sensuality does not appear to have been one of his faults. The effrontery of the theory is borne out by effrontery in dealing with the data, and an unsavoury myth is staged on a crass misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

And this kind of factitious falsity, it would seem,

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finds currency alongside of the Harris myth, which in one of its branches represents Shakespeare as enslaved for life, not to a worthless man but to a worthless woman. The Butler myth, indeed, has not met with the acclamation bestowed on its rival; a circumstance which prompts a hesitant query as to whether any or many of Mr. Harris's admirers welcomed his thesis as taking the wind out of the sails of the other. However that may be, there is no comfort for the rational critic in seeing one form of irrational criticism acclaimed as blocking the way of another. The daub drawn by Mr. Harris (with a superfluity of spurious tribute), presenting Shakespeare as a miserable sexual energumen, on a par with the absinthe-drinker, is in itself—all questions of "reverence" apart, as they ought to be—an insult to the critical intelligence, and ought as such to be hung round the necks of those critics who applauded it.

It not only defied all the concrete evidence even as Butler did: it set up, in respect of its wider propositions, a conception of dramatic art untenable by anyone capable of analysing the problem, and, if really held, incompatible with any intelligent appreciation of good fictive art of any kind. I know not how far these stampedes of unreasoning impressionism stand for a lurking jealousy of Shakespeare's unparalleled prestige, a temperamental reaction against an author felt to be over-admired, a sense of being bored with the fame of Aristides, a desire to have something boldly said against the ever-praised man. Such a reaction is within the possibilities of human nature; and the proper course of criticism towards it, in the present case, is not one of mere counter-irritation, which is but a lapse into kindred irrationalism. It is to show that, whatever criticism Shakespeare as artist or man may justly incur, *this* is not criticism but the charlatanism of the *esprit faux*, the declaimer who professes to reason

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and in reality cannot coherently think. The statement of the Harris theorem, as we have seen, is its rebuttal for those who take the trouble to realise its implications.

And so with Butler's theory. Its adherents may or may not be of his own warped cast of mind, enamoured of its perversities and partisanisms, trailing a theorem in the hope of giving offence or creating bewilderment. It seems to have mattered little to Butler whether his theories were true or not. Wilde, the born artist of the perverse, valued alike a paradox and a mere inversion of fact for the sheer artistic pleasure of phrasing it all. With Butler the motive is whim of self-assertion. His theory that the ODYSSEY originated at Trapani was interesting and arguable; but it was on the festive theorem of its female authorship that he spent most of his parade. That he had his own peculiar motive for besmirching Shakespeare we have seen. But the sufficient answer is that he backs his charge with evidence of a degree of strength such as would not avail to ground a charge against Tarquin of annoying a woman in the street.

The author of the "Dark Lady" Sonnets may or may not have been as besotted as some of them declare the speaker to have been; but to say either is to say that he was not the pervert of Butler's theory. It is thoughtless enough to see in Sonnets 92 and 93 missives to a man; but it is much more stupid to represent them as addressed, with 95 and 96, and 109 and 112, by a man to another man in the relation alleged by Butler. It is a strangely insensitive thinking that, in virtue of an equivocal rubric, can see in the series 109-115 only the tribute of a poet to a male patron; but the mind which can see in 116 the outpouring of a corrupt soul is not to be argued with. In one aspect, the Butler theory makes of the sonneteer the most impossibly impudent of all literary hypocrites: in another it makes him the

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attractive blend of fool and blackguard which the theorist sees in the addressee.

Yet perhaps this development of the canonical conception of the Sonnets may do the service of forcing conventional readers to reconsider what they have been reading under official guidance. In a truly critical atmosphere it could not have arisen. It flourishes in particular, as regards its ordinary adherents, in respect of a few Sonnets which, for a competent reader, deny Shakespeare's authorship; and even these are not all rationally interpretable as addressed to a male. When the Sonnets are critically grouped in respect of the sex of the recipient, and sifted as to authenticity, Butler's theory is not likely to cumber the ground. That he conned the whole mass of the Sonnets, which he says he learned by heart, without one new suspicion of the authenticity of any, is the sufficient evidence of the indigence of his critical faculty at the most essential point.

But the denigrators still have a large field open to them. Mr. Harris, occulted, is superseded for the time being by Professor Legouis, of the Sorbonne, who argues from "the Bacchic element" in HENRY IV, and from "tradition," that Shakespeare up till 1601 was much given to drinking. It is quite a compact thesis in its way, standing on its own ground and disregarding the rival thesis of "sensuality." It is a suddenly reformed drunkard, in the opinion of M. Legouis, who makes Hamlet denounce wassailing, and Cassio curse the spirit of wine, and who exhibits the orgy of the triumvirs in ANTONY. I quote from *The Times* report of the Professor's British Academy lecture of June last:

Moreover, all his great tragedies from 1601 to 1608 offer us in their protagonists, whoever they are, the same characteristics of impulsiveness, want of self-control, fits of outrageous railing and cursing, that bespeak a common temperament, closely akin to that of men who

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either bear the penalty of previous excesses of their own or suffer from ancestral intemperance. The most plausible explanation of the phenomenon, M. Legouis contended, was that the poet himself felt in his own person the effects of prolonged tavern life, while his intellect, left untouched, could through introspection follow the workings of the disease, and his imagination, lashed to greater vividness than ever, turned them to supreme artistic realisations. His whole career might be summed up as representing the successive stages of poetical intoxication: first, the days of youthful delight, when all is sparkle and jollity in the cup; then the years of surfeit, melancholy, and penance, leading to Macbeth's hallucinations and delirium; lastly, the recovery, when the poet removed from London to Stratford, at safe distance from the Mermaid and its temptations.

La logique française, in regard to Shakespeare as in regard to finance, appears to be still idiosyncratic. It happens that the uncontrolled type of character is definitely presented in Capulet and in Tybalt, in the play-period in which M. Legouis represents Shakespeare as quite cheerfully intemperate. It also happens to be the fact that Shakespeare did not work on *any* tragedies, apart from ROMEO and the chronicle plays and his early work on HAMLET, until after 1600. He had thus no *occasion* to present the tragic side of wine in his first decade of play-writing; and the implicit assumption that in that period he would not have pictured a remorseful Cassio is a pleasing example of *petitio principii*. The homily on northern drunkenness in HAMLET is actually suggested in Belleforest, who was Kyd's source for the pre-Shakespearean play.

For English readers, who merely "muddle through," it is perhaps unnecessary to remark that neither as to Hamlet nor Macbeth nor Othello nor Lear nor Antony nor Coriolanus is it once suggested that either personal or inherited alcoholism plays any part in character; and that *after* 1608, in Leontes, we have the uncontrolled type again presented, still with no hint of the effects of drinking. And even if there were any

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ground for a surmise of such speculation on Shakespeare's part, it would be none the less impossible to see how we can, by other than Legouisian or Harrisian logic, infer youthful drunkenness on Shakespeare's part.

It is particularly odd, too, in connection with our present inquiry, that there should be no hint about the joys of wine in the Sonnets, where surely the young wine-bibber might have been expected to indicate his personal proclivity. Before 1600, it is only in HENRY IV and the comedies, as in Elizabethan comedies in general, that we have festive drinking-scenes, because such scenes were normal.

But all that is by the way. The new academic theory will, doubtless, give some satisfaction in France, and to Prohibitionists in the United States, if not in England; and there are other openings. Miss Clemence Dane, in the interests of poetic drama, has pictured Shakespeare for us as the cause of the death of Marlowe; and the notable explanation of ROMEO AND JULIET, by Sir E. K. Chambers, as the result of Shakespeare's affair with the Dark Lady, points to a thrilling possibility of understanding MACBETH as the work of a man who with his wife had committed murder, and thus knew how it felt, in the doing and in the retrospect. It would be more difficult, doubtless, to represent the dramatist as guilty of theft, or black-mailing; but between the Baconians and the Rutlandites and the Derbians and the Oxfordians we have a cloud of witnesses to his having systematically committed a lifelong fraud, with the complicity of his company. Of "documents in madness" there is no end. And as the impulse of truth-seeking sometimes effects the aims of the impulse of denigration, the latter impulse will always find opportunities to pass for the former.

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NOTE

I know not whether the late W. C. Hazlitt, in his *Shakespear Himself and his Work* (2nd ed. 1903, p. 182), intended to convey or suggest a theory similar to Butler's. His comment is too obscurely stated to be profitably argued over; and for various reasons I have omitted to discuss Mr. Hazlitt's work with regard to the Sonnets in general. The comment would have involved a tedious amount of unimportant rebuttal. His theory (pp. 174-6) that the sonnet prefixed to the 1613 edition of Florio's *Montaigne* was written by Shakespeare deserves only prompt dismissal; and his comprehensive disparagement of the Sonnets in mass would appear to be a hereditary perversity.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary.

IN the process of sifting the data, in the light of all the theoretic and critical discussion, we have seen reason to come to certain positive and negative judgments, which may now be tabulated.

1. The warranty for the Thorpe Quarto, alike as to the inspiration and the authenticity of the whole mass of the Sonnets, is substantially bad. The credit of the publisher is of the worst, his quasi-dedication of Marlowe's version of Lucan exhibiting him as at once flighty and unscrupulous in his business. His information was certainly bad if he is to be read as ascribing the whole of the Sonnets to one motive, or one instigation, or one author, or as written to one recipient. If, on the other hand, he is read as merely dedicating them to the person who provided him with the MS., there is not a shadow of ground for accepting his assertion that the whole contents are "Shakespeare's Sonnets," though he may well have found that as the apparent title of an album which began with the matrimonial series. He at the same time ascribed to Shakespeare the *LOVER'S COMPLAINT*, the grounds for regarding which as non-Shakespearean are so strong as to convince some critics who accept all or nearly all of the Sonnets as genuine. Finally, the publication is palpably piratical; and there is reason to infer that either Shakespeare or someone connected with the Sonnets secured its suppression at an early stage of the sale.

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2. To assume, then, on the authority of Thorpe's dedication, that the Sonnets are all from one hand, and that 126 are addressed to one male recipient, when the same authority really asserts, if anything of the kind, that the whole 154 are in the same category, is no more reasonable on the part of the literary critic than it would be on the part of a judge making a legal investigation.

3. When, however, we study the relevant data, keeping in view Shakespeare's dedications of his two poems to Southampton, and noting Southampton's family affairs about 1591-3, we see our way to two reasonable inferences:

(a) The first seventeen Sonnets, urging a youth to marry in the interests of his family, are at once intelligible as addressed to young Southampton at the instance of his mother, she being very desirous of having him marry the granddaughter of Lord Burleigh, as Burleigh is known to have wished him to do.

(b) The fact that William Hervey, a friend of the family, some years afterwards became the third husband of Southampton's mother, makes it readily conceivable that he should have acted as intermediary for her in commissioning the young Shakespeare to write Sonnets to her son by way of inducing him to marry. Southampton being a devotee of the theatre, he is very likely to have known, or known of, Shakespeare as the author of such work as the opening scene of the COMEDY OF ERRORS, and of the quatrain dialogue in that play (1591). Such a theory at once supplies the required motivation for such Sonnets; and if Hervey were the intermediary, he might be known as having first instigated Shakespeare to sonneting. And Thorpe's "copy" may have been what he knew to be Hervey's album.

Thus, though even on that view Thorpe's dedication is ill-informed and heedless as regards the entire collection, it becomes intelligible as proceeding on

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some knowledge. A dedication to Hervey, even on the part of so flighty a person as Thorpe, wishing him "immortality," is much more likely than such a dedication on his part to a mere tout who procured for him the "copy." It is certainly an objection to this view that Thorpe's reference to "promised" eternity suggests the immortality promised in so many Sonnets to the recipient or subject. But, without stressing the possible answer that Thorpe believed some of those Sonnets to be addressed to the "begetter" and *not* to the patron, it may suffice to say that such an objection can be pressed only by those who take the whole of Part I to be addressed to Pembroke, which is an untenable thesis.

4. On the other hand, all the other identifications of "W. H." are entirely unplausible. To print Southampton's initials reversed, or the initials of Lord Herbert, would be an extreme and a perilous impertinence on the part of the piratical publisher, who must have known that either peer would resent being so mentioned in connection with a book of Sonnets some of which invited curious speculation as to his actions. If "Mr." were resorted to merely as a blind, why should initials be given at all? Southampton was already Earl in his 'teens, and Herbert was always "the Lord Herbert" (never Master William Herbert) till he became at the death of his father the Earl of Pembroke. Further, the matrimonial Sonnets include appeals to the recipient to marry in order to save his house from extinction; whereas Herbert had a father and a brother living. Thus, even if we let pass the weak argument that the phrase "thou hadst a father" does not necessarily imply that the father is dead, the Pembroke theory simply will not fit the case.

5. The inference of a Mr. William Hughes from the "Will" sonnets, and from the italicised *Hews* of Sonnet 20, is countered by the equally fanciful theory

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that *Hews* stands for an anagram of "Henry Wriothesley, Earl Southampton." Such inferences bear no argument; and, as has been remarked, the italicised *Rose* of Sonnet 109 would, on the view taken of Sonnet 20, justify the inference of a recipient with *that* surname. The Hervey theory alone remains satisfactory; and the fact that knights were in that age not infrequently spoken of as "Mr." removes the one semblance of difficulty raised by the fact that Hervey in 1596 became "Sir."

6. Finally, the whole stylistic phenomena of the opening group of Sonnets point to the 1592 period; and Sonnet 26, addressed to the patron, and hoping for help "to put apparel on my tattered loving" (that is, in all likelihood, to enable the poet to print his first poem with its dedication), which is entirely congruous with Shakespeare's position in 1592, is just as incongruous with his secured position in 1598, when it must be dated, at the earliest, if it is to be connected with Lord Herbert. As regards the style echoes, not only have we close correspondences—in fact, duplications of matter—as between the opening Sonnets and the *VENUS*, but the matter (invitation to become a father) is so incongruous in the poem that it cannot reasonably be supposed to have originated there, whereas it is intelligible as being used afresh in a poem which had to be eked out anyhow to book length.

7. Nor is there any ground in the style for dating even the majority of the Sonnets in or after 1598, the date of Pembroke's arrival in London as a youth of eighteen. Prominent critics of the present day would seem to have been appealed to in their youth by the Pembroke theory; and though they mostly admit that it is incapable of proof, they seem in some cases to retain their impressions to the extent of arguing in a general way for a late dating of the mass of the Sonnets in respect of style and contents—as, indeed, did Craig,

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who was not a Pembrokean. At the same time, recognising sonnet notes in the early plays, they date those as late as they can. It is here submitted that no such case has been made out, and that only a minority of the Sonnets are reasonably to be dated after 1598, in respect either of style or of purport.

8. But the reasonable degree of certainty thus far to be claimed fails us when we study the differences of substance in the Sonnets intervening between the 17th and the 26th. Already, even in the opening group, we find in the case of No. 5 (with which No. 6 connects) such relative poverty of execution that we are warned to keep in view the possibility that more poets than one may have been commissioned to write matrimonial sonnets. On the other hand, noting the literary faults in the *VENUS* and the *LUCRECE*, we must recognise the possibility that in a piece of task-work the young poet may once in a way have turned out a poor sonnet. But when we come to the 18th, where again the execution is poor though the theme is changed, it becomes impossible to assume that the same poet is addressing the same person at the same period, if we take Sonnet 26 as properly placed in that series. That Sonnet fits perfectly into the Southampton theory if we regard it as presented with the MS. of the *VENUS*, appealing for patronage. In any case, it must antedate the Sonnets 18-25 if these are to be reckoned Shakespeare's, and written in his own person.

9. Negative inferences, or an agnostic position, are thus forced upon us. No. 18 ought to rank as doubtful, in respect of its frequently third-rate diction; No. 20 may reasonably be ascribed to Barnabe Barnes; 21 and 22, acceptable as of Shakespeare's penning, raise other questions. We have no right to assume that 21 is written of a man, or that 22, with its opening line and its closing line, is written in the poet's own person. The poet who penned matrimonial Sonnets

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on commission, some of them almost obviously for the mother to present, may have written others also by request; and 21 might well come as from the mother. Only a presupposition as to general lateness of date could lead to the dating of the style here as otherwise than early. It has all the early qualities. Concerning 23 also, grounds for an "impersonal" interpretation have been proposed above; and 24, which again falls to the "poverty line," is strongly to be challenged as alien; while 25, which has the Shakespearean rhythm and quality, cannot well be conceived as addressed to Southampton, even after the 26th. It may very well, if personal, have been addressed to a woman. And, that being so, it may possibly have been written *for* Southampton to present to a woman. The "note of sincerity," it has been urged above, is not to be taken as negating impersonality in a sonnet penned by a dramatist, who might sing as well for his friend as for himself.

10. Thus led to harbour persistent doubts as to the authenticity of some Sonnets, and as to the "personal" character of others, in what is commonly treated as the first "group," we are again and again compelled to put similar challenges as we proceed. The 27th and 28th have distinctly un-Shakespearean aspects, and are within the scope of a cultured amateur, addressing a woman; and the 29th, which has such a personal note and such a Shakespearean quality, is not plausibly to be regarded as addressed to the patron; since the 30th, which has the same rhythmic note and the same burden, is much more easily to be interpreted as addressed to a woman. The 31st, again, sets up much literary misgiving; and even the 32nd, though its purport fits the theory of poet and patron, has style touches which suggest another hand.

11. On the other hand, the group 33-5, which suddenly introduce the shadow of breach of faith, have

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at once a personal and a Shakespearean quality, and constitute for us one of the darker enigmas of the collection. But we should be on our guard against supposing that No. 36, with its declaration, "our undivided loves are one," can be addressed to the same recipient. If that be addressed to Southampton, the three preceding must be to someone else; and it is to be remembered that Hervey may by this time have become an intimate friend of the poet; to say nothing of the fact that he was a "Will." As the "Will" sonnets themselves have been justly challenged, all that side of the problem remains enigmatic. But Sonnet 36, on the other hand, can quite fairly be interpreted as dramatic and as coming from a man to a woman; though it may be difficult to imagine Southampton as employing his poet to write such a missive for him.

12. The 37th Sonnet, in turn, strongly militates against the assumption that Southampton had been the treacherous friend previously reproached. The line

Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth

may be understood as addressed to the patron only when we dissociate him from 33-5; and so with the 38th. The 39th, again, insistently raises the question of destination and "personality." It is perhaps to be regarded as addressed by a woman to a man, whether or not it is held to be written by the speaker. And the essential nullity of its thesis, which is applicable to any praise of one beloved, may be conceived as a dictated theme. But the rhythm suggests Shakespeare.

13. In the Sonnets 40-2 we return to the theme of 33-5, and again with the strongest reason for denying that the recipient can have been Southampton, especially if we are to regard 37-8 as addressed to him. These suppositions create not an enigma but a flat contradiction, which no one is entitled to deduce. The

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real enigma remains, in the form of the inference that the false friend was someone other than the patron. On the other hand, the diction at times so distinctly falls below the Shakespearean level that the argument of probable impoverishment of style under stress of perturbation is needed to reconcile us to the assumption that the hand is Shakespeare's.

14. In the second-rate series 43-7, on the other hand, that argument is lacking; and, as has been argued above, 48 seems best interpretable as "impersonal," and as written for a woman to a man, while 49 is equally construable as addressed to a woman. Nos. 50-1, again, recall the alien literary quality of 43-7; and 52, yet again, implies a female destination. The 53rd, on the other hand, is not suggestive of Shakespeare in quality, though the closing lines again point to the patron—and a patron open to no reproach. That 53 and 54 might be from the pen of Chapman has been suggested as part of an argument to the effect that thus he competed for Southampton's favour.

15. Reasons have been given above for excluding as non-Shakespearean, in any case, both 54 and 55. No. 56, again, implies a female recipient, and 57-8 are naturally to be so interpreted, "your servant" being one of the Elizabethan formulas for "your lover." The uncritical interpretation of such Sonnets as necessarily addressed by Shakespeare to his patron is one of the typical results of the unthinking or unreasoning acceptance of Thorpe's dedication at its supposed face-value.

16. Not only the movement but the purport of 59-60 justifies us in taking those Sonnets as genuine; but the abrupt change of theme and style in 61 once more warns us that we are reading a miscellany. Certainly such pieces cannot confidently be regarded as from poet to patron, or even as "personal." And in

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62 we come to the type of Sonnet which raises insuperable difficulties if it is to be read as a personal utterance of the poet. This and the next, with 73-4, cannot be reconciled with 81 as coming from one hand; and reasons have been shown for marking 81 as un-Shakespearean and surmising that the others, if genuine, are impersonally written, on behalf of an older person than the poet. But it is hard to be sure that 62 and 63, with their clumsy diction, are Shakespeare's at all. This does not hold of all the "Time" Sonnets, it being one of the features of Shakespeare's habitual thought to be brooding on the swift passing of all things. But that he should predicate "tanned antiquity" of himself in his thirties while *ex hypothesi* he is infatuated over the Dark Lady of Part II, is not an inference to be accepted on the strength of a presupposition which ignores the "dramatic" quality of his genius and the circumstances of his outset in sonneting. And when, as in 66, we seem to have the quite personal utterance of the poet, the closing line much more easily suggests a woman than a man as the recipient. That the player should lament over the thought of leaving the patron "alone" is a witless hypothesis.

17. In the "Rival Poet" Sonnets, as in other series, we find both the personal note, in Shakespearean verse, and a much inferior quality, as in 79 and 81. That 69 and 70 are Chapman sonnets, and that Chapman was the special rival, has been argued in detail in a previous chapter. And though it should not be pretended that all alien matter can be confidently identified, 67 is to be challenged as having none of the kinds of touch which in 68 recall Shakespeare. It may seem arbitrary, on the other hand, to distinguish between 71 and 72 as to destination, the theme being the same; but that fact is really a reason for recognising the possibility of two recipients.

18. Thus, again, in a collection so abounding in

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changes of hand and of recipient, contiguity should not lead us confidently to regard 75 and 76 as addressed to the recipient of 73-4, or as both addressed to a man because 76 appears to be meant for the patron. And as to 77, which connects with 122, there is no internal sign of Shakespeare's hand.

19. Passing from the "Rival Poet" group, we find again literary reasons for ascribing 87 rather to the rival than to Shakespeare, while recognising enigmatic matter of different kinds in 88-98. Some (88-90, 92-3, 97-8) are quite naturally to be read as destined for a woman recipient, the patron theory being here either unworkable or unplausible even where the recipient is a male. The literary quality is Shakespearean, save in 91¹ and 94, leaving us newly conscious of enigma. But when 94, with its quotation of a line from EDWARD III, is seen to be of a different timbre and texture from the rest, we have a new reason for suspecting the presence of the alien hand in 142, which so viciously—Mr. Forrest would say vilely—adapts another line from the same play. In discussing the dating of those Sonnets, I limited myself in the main to showing that the quotations in question are quite compatible with a date years before 1596, when it was published. But we must either count both Sonnets very early, in explanation of the badness of their art, or regard them as non-Shakespearean; and to this last inference I find myself more and more inclined as I again and again resurvey the whole Quarto. On that view, the two Sonnets in question might fairly be dated after 1596, and ascribed to someone who had read the play. But many must have known and admired the acted play.

20. Reasons of style and silliness of purport have been given for assigning No. 99 to Barnes; and 100 and

¹ This seems to connect with 92; but that can connect equally well with 90.

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101 may well be impugned for their poverty. Only the habit of seeing the mass as addressed to the patron, and a sense of the difficulty of raising such conventional matter to a good poetic level, can make them pass unchallenged; and 103 and 105 are no better. That 104, 106, and 108 put Shakespearean touches into the same theme is not a reason for assuming that all the Sonnets which "say o'er the very same" are all from the same hand. That some of the weaker were written for others is the only hypothesis which could make all so pass.

21. Number 107, despite its conventional finish, must be assigned to Shakespeare, as a personal message to the patron; but for that very reason, as well as for others, we must recognise 109-12 as otherwise addressed. They have no imaginable coherence with 107. That they are to a woman is the only natural interpretation; that they are "personal" is not so clear, though they have that air. So read, they seem to tell of the renunciation of the Delilah of Part II. In the three which follow, we are again led to surmise a woman recipient, with the caveat that 113 and 114 are un-Shakespearean alike in rhythm, in diction, and in thesis; and that even 115 is distinctly open to suspicion in respect of its commonplace phrasing. The next, which is certainly Shakespearean, raises another question of destination. There is no solid ground for supposing it to refer to Southampton's marriage; and inasmuch as it implies a sense of surprise and personal though restrained disappointment, it raises speculation in other directions. But where there is no evidence, discussion is idle.

22. No. 117 distinctly points back to 109-12, and no less distinctly implies a woman recipient; but it is only the continuation of the same theme in 118 that can lead us to pass that tuneless and charmless Sonnet as Shakespeare's. I cannot account it his. The next, which, outgoing the others, confesses to a past

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"ruin'd love," thus raising new questions of personality and destination, is better, if only we cease reading "fitted," with the editors who so submissively make a verb out of the noun "fit" in the sense of fever-fit. ("Flitted" is not very good; but it is precedented, and passable.) But 120 raises a quite different situation, hinting of the groups 33-5, 40-2, and, like them, excluding the assumption of their being addressed to the patron. Finally, 121 stands aloof, inviting Mr. Forrest's ascription of it to the patron himself; a solution which needs the acceptance of his whole theory to carry it off. It certainly does not suggest Shakespeare save by force of phrase.

23. Passing 122 as probably non-Shakespearean, we come upon two that must pass as genuine, 123, unaddressed to anybody but probably to be connected with 124 as concerning the patron. Of the 125th it must suffice to repeat that the phrasing is notably Chapmanesque and the syntax quite un-Shakespearean; and of the non-Sonnet 126, which is cryptic with a difference, that its authenticity is not a thing to be confident of.

24. We have thus seen reason to doubt, more or less strongly, the Shakespearean authorship of more than forty Sonnets in what may be termed Part I of the Quarto; and to interpret as very probably addressed to a woman, or women, some thirty-two, instead of following the time-honoured practice of treating all save the merely reflective as addressed to one man. Even of those treated as non-Shakespearean, a considerable number suggest a woman recipient; and even as regards those which point to a male, there are strong grounds for refusing to recognise only one. Those which are commonly held to charge the patron with treachery are irreconcilable with many others held as so addressed. The false friend may or may not have been a "Will," though our Hervey hypothesis supplies

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a possible candidate for the position and even for the authorship of the "Will" sonnets.

25. Concerning a number of the Shakespearean Sonnets, further, there rises the question whether they are not "dramatic" in the sense of having been written for others to present. Even after the opening group there are some which might well have been written for the mother to present to her son; one or two others which might be missives from a woman to her lover, and a larger number, including some of the best, which can be conceived as written for a man to present to a woman.

26. In Part II, finally, we find even a higher percentage of challengeable Sonnets. Many critics reject 145, 153, 154; and on the same grounds of literary inferiority 128 and 130, and the three "Will" Sonnets, 135, 136, and 143 (leaving 133-4 in doubt), should be resolutely called in question. They are flat-footed, feeble, museless, to the last degree, and would have been so recognised anywhere else. Nor is 131, which might have been written by the same hand, at all convincing. It is not a matter of ethical challenge; for 132, 138, 140, 141, and above all 144, 147, 148, 150 remain to constitute a record of confessedly ill-placed love and conscious folly. No reasonable weeding of the section can leave it pleasing as a personal revelation. But if to the Sonnets thus questioned we add, for reasons previously offered, 129, 131, 133, 134, 142, and 151, we shall be setting aside more than half of the twenty-eight Sonnets of the section. Concerning 129, doubtless, many readers and critics, not all of them devotees of the didactic, will refuse assent, defying inquisition. But when some of the admirers are challenged to explain their grounds for dismissing the "Will" sonnets, it will be found that the "ethical" sonnet is open to the same kind of technical analysis with the unethical.

27. When it is realised that criticism must dismiss, for their sheer platitude of theme and style, the "Will"

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Sonnets, so long serving as a biographical keystone for successive editors, the question at once arises whether the other elements of the second section may not call for the same treatment. The "Will" sonneteer (possibly Hervey, as aforesaid) was quite capable of 130, 131, and maybe, at a pinch, 133-4. But the literary sense cannot let the wish be father to the thought. After 134 we are driven to confess that, save for 142 and 151, and the admittedly trivial pieces, the quality is much higher. The "Will" performer could no more have written 148 than 146.

28. We are thus not "whitewashing Shakespeare," save in so far as we relieve him, on the whole count, of fifty-odd more or less bad Sonnets. We still leave him associated, in Sonnets which do not deny his hand, with a Dark Lady of reprehensible character, who for the time has him in thrall, though he takes terrible revenges, and we have no clear situation. Sonnet 149 represents the lady as reproaching the poet, not without justice after 148, for deficiency of love; and that forensic Sonnet cannot be technically impeached. Nor can 150, if we recognise that "powerful might" is probably a misprint. Number 151, with its obscene jesting (so different a voice from that of 141), its markedly halting rhythm after the first two lines, and its poor diction, is in another case. It cannot be Shakespeare's, in point of mere handiwork.

29. Such Sonnets as those we have latterly passed cannot critically be reckoned "dramatic" or "impersonal": to write them for another would be no more creditable than to write them, with or without presentation, for oneself. And the hypothesis, above suggested, that some Sonnets may have been written for insertion in plays, unprovable in any case, does not seem readily applicable here. Enigmas emerged for us at an early stage of the Quarto. We are left facing the darkest at the close.

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Conclusion.

To the automatic protest, sure to be made, against the "disintegration" of Thorpe's miscellany, it should suffice to reply that practically everybody rejects at least three of the Sonnets; that some esteemed critics go further; and that this admission of the non-homogeneous character of the book excludes any a priori limit. And to those who will consent to cultivate their æsthetic perceptions instead of their sense of authority, it should surely be a relief to realise that they are justified in dismissing as non-genuine about one-third of the collection.

It has indeed been admitted, in a previous chapter, that no poet could be expected to write a hundred and fifty felicitous sonnets, and that with Shakespeare's Elizabethan rivals, including Spenser, Sidney, Daniel, and Drayton, felicity is rather the exception than the rule. But Shakespeare, be it obstinately repeated, faults in his own way. From his outset he is in the front line; and his singular mastery of phrase and feeling, where he is really bent on using it, should bar the ascription to him of mere clumsiness of diction and fatuity of idea. The modish faults of the Poems are part of a commercial enterprise. The Sonnets, not penned for sale, make no such appeal to a passing taste, and, apart from certain conventions of theme, are specifically fresh and vital, as they so well could be. Their style, like that of the Plays, is individual; the singing here is spontaneous; even the prentice work is unique in its kind.

It is that unquestionable superiority that compels us to see Shakespeare's hand in the Quarto, ill-vouched as that is by the shifty and flighty Thorpe. Here is a mass of verse of which the greater part is simply unmatchable, in bulk, in the Elizabethan sonnet-corpus for mastery of music, charm of rhythm, and

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poignancy of expression. This is the one violinist, so to speak, in that orchestra. Sidney, at his best, which is fine indeed, wields another instrument; Daniel and Drayton, to whom, as to Sidney, Shakespeare certainly listened, are at their best less consummate, and at their average are in comparison negligible, as is Spenser in this field. Like Tennyson, he lacks the sonnet hand. Even if we did not find in the Quarto a score of unmistakeable cues to the early Poems and Plays of Shakespeare, it would be idle to surmise a Great Unknown who thus eclipses all the "meaner beauties of the night." That way Baconism lies.

How, then, are we to reduce to critical precision our discrimination between Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean work, in a collection in which even the inferior matter often has a fluidity above the average degree attained by the minor sonneteers? At times, in deciding that the poverty of a given Quarto Sonnet is a quite non-Shakespearean poverty, we are moved to suspect that the writer was a pupil of the master. But here we have no such clear morphological guidance as we find in studying the composite or spurious plays. In RICHARD II, RICHARD III, and Parts II and III of HENRY VI, the hand, the voice, the gait of Shakespeare, when occasionally it emerges, detaches itself for us as does that of a known friend in a crowd. Versification and phrase, rhythm and feeling, the way the words go, the timbre—everything, where his touch appears, calls aloud to us: *This* is he, *that* is not. In the Sonnets, where the fixed form, the rhymed line, the sonneting habit of phrase, set up a certain external uniformity that does not attach to blank verse in different hands, our clues are fewer and less obvious.

But clues they are, none the less; and they are perhaps clearer for readers insensitive to blank-verse rhythm than some of the style tests for the Plays. In the Sonnets we look to style and idea. If the young poet,

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penning the matrimonial Sonnets, is conceivable as falling into commonness, it may be in writing one in haste on a sudden demand (though we are always to remember that other poets may have been "in commission" in that case), he is not to be supposed therefore capable of the meretricious stuff of No. 20, of the fatuity of No. 79, of the saccharine silliness of No. 99; or, on the other hand, of the flat touches of 24, or of the laboured phrasing and strained fancies of such pieces as 27 and 28, where what would normally pass as a poetic theme is handled without one line of good song, even the "jewel" trope from *ROMEO AND JULIET* being mishandled.

These, be it observed, must rank as "personal" Sonnets, *cris du cœur*, though certainly not of such anguish as could plausibly be reckoned likely to make the singer hoarse. Yet he remains tuneless. And wherever we thus find sheer artistic failure with a theme that is fit for good art, or songless metre where the master can so visibly make everything rhythmic, or dead concetti where he could easily have starred the lines with beauty; or simple sonneteering silliness—so different a thing from the unwisdom of tortured feeling—we are critically entitled to deny more or less confidently that the pen is Shakespeare's. If this be denied by the chaired mandarin, conscious of innate authority, let that despotic dissentient justify the practically universal verdict on the trivial pieces of Part II. If he accepts that, by what critical right does *he* pick and choose?

Faithful readers, indeed, may honestly protest that they never detected all these inequalities in the Quarto, or at least never felt the inferiorities to be so marked as to justify challenge of authorship. But if they will study the history of what is loosely called the Higher Criticism, in regard alike to the Biblical and other canons, they will find a latterly reached demon-

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stration that in matters literary, as in matters of natural science, nothing is more common than the missing of facts lying under our noses. And the "reddening cheek" which "no contradiction bears" in these matters should be a warning, not a rallying flag.

The matter has now been at least sufficiently argued to initiate businesslike discussion where argument is accepted as the way to opinion. The intransigent attitudes of Mr. Forrest and Dr. Eichhoff rather defy than invite it, though Mr. Forrest is the most genial of *frondeurs*. If he had not had the fatal inspiration of his theory of five competitors, to which he gives a deceptive air of scrupulous method by at times reducing the leet to three or four, he would probably have been a safer taster, and would have escaped the miscarriage of scouting "steep-up" as non-Shakespearean, in disregard of "steep-down" in *OTHELLO*. If he had not to keep on foot his theory of competitions called by a patron "fond on praise," yet inviting blame, he would hardly have gone to such lengths as that of calling "delves the parallels in beauty's brow" an inferior parody of "carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow"; and only a dire need of fulfilling the theory could have inspired his choice of names for his competitors.

The Quarto is certainly a miscellany; but there are more ways of making a miscellany than a sonnet-writing competition in which Donne and Daniel vie with Barnes and Warner; and similarities of theme are too common in every sonnet-collection of the time to give ground for surmise of different hands in every case. Each of Mr. Forrest's competitors, in fact, repeats his themes. Still, there may have been in some cases a matching of sonnets without the formidable machinery of Mr. Forrest's theory.

In view of the unlikeliness of speedy agreement on such matters, the unlaborious reader, if he looks

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in on this debate at all, will be apt to turn away with a complaint that we leave "*La Laide Dame sans Merci*" still masked. We do indeed. Mistress Fitton, of dubious memory, may enter the Sonnets at 151, as to which unsavoury item Massey made the interesting surmise that it was penned by Pembroke. It surely was not framed by Shakespeare, addressing *his* unfair and frail siren. That some of the Sonnets suggest a *grande dame* as recipient, we have recognised. But neither in Mary Fitton nor in Mrs. Davenant can we pretend to identify with even moderate probability the recipient of Nos. 127, 132, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, or the subject of 144, which, if read as concerning Mary Fitton and Pembroke, does not at all fit with the facts of their notorious amour. Some even of these others are doubtful; and the "Will" sonnets and 128, 130, 131, 134 (imputing "beauty"), and 142 are more so, unless we say that misplaced love can shake the artist as it shakes the man. But there remains a masked siren.

She must have been an extremely interesting person; such as Balzac would have made much of; and those are almost to be envied whose simple inductive processes enable them to detect her in Cleopatra, or Cressida, or any vibrating voice in LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST. But try to think of Shakespeare writing wailful Sonnets to Cressida! This was a subtler and more potent Circe. She may lay claim, in the Shades, to having played an important part in his education; for educate him she did, if he wrote those verses either to or of her, in his own person. The finer Sonnets, 109-12, 117, 119, suggest that he has already renounced her when they are written—if *they* also are written in his own person. He is certainly well over it all when he makes Rosalind remind us that "Men have died and the worms have eaten them, but not for love"—Rosalind, who with Beatrice and Viola and

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Portia and Cordelia and Desdemona and Perdita and Virgilia and Imogen reveals to us what those all-seeing eyes saw to be adorable in women.

Remembering them all, we can hardly forbear asking ourselves whether that mightily critical spirit was really shaken and captured by a *belle laide* to the extent of writing on her account most of the Sonnets round which the stress of speculation has so long played. Massey, struck by the defect of manhood in parts of what he called "the back slums of the appendix," sought to make those Sonnets impersonal things, written for Elizabeth Vernon to send to Lady Rich—a stress of fantasy not to be assented to even for Shakespeare's sake. But there are things to be remembered which, reflected on, make the portent less mysterious. It is not merely that Keats, who was no weakling and no *ingénu*, was tortured by his Fanny Brawne; but that Shakespeare is in himself a paradox of genius.

With all his unique congenital endowment, he is late in finding his spiritual manhood. Marlowe had traced his fiery circle when Shakespeare, at the same age, was but beginning his vaster ascent. In the Poems he plays follow-my-leader when Marlowe has written *HERO AND LEANDER*; and the *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, his first complete play, a youthful miracle of rhythms, is spiritually juvenile. Only on the stepping-stones of other men's work, through *KING JOHN* and *HENRY IV*, and the dazzling prose comedies, does he climb to his heights, where he is not merely the adult but the superman. The artist who wrote the *LUCRECE* at thirty was but a marvellous juvenile. Six or ten years later, had he kept it by him and found it, he would have tossed it in the fire, and, to clear his artistic conscience, would have penned a thing of pity and terror such as Dante could not have outdone.

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Whatever were the furnace that had made him anew, made anew he was. And belike the dark Circe had played no small part in that transfiguration. She found him essentially youthful, whatever he might say in his time-stricken mood, in which all things seemed to him in swift decay. And even for that time of life his experience is not abnormal, given the spirit compounded of flesh and flame. "Forty year" is Thackeray's term for the attainment of sex wisdom; and we must not be led by the genial assumptions of Bagehot to think of the author of *LEAR* as a soundly nerved and imperturbable Saxon. Greatly gifted poets are not so framed.

In the only portrait of Shakespeare that is at all satisfying, that named "the Ely," which seems to be quite possibly the original of the unhappy Droeshout engraving, we look into strangely tragical eyes. So might the most sensitive of all Elizabethan souls have looked out in a time of obsession. He was made of penetrable stuff. In a highly interesting and important article, recently published by Dr. Samuel A. Tannenbaum of New York,¹ making a new analysis and study of his will, he is revealed as much perturbed, in his very last days, by the unwise marriage of his daughter Judith. The living lyre of all human feeling, grown adult, was human in every string.

Thus does one seem to oneself to find him out, to capture him if but for a moment, realising Trench's luminous lines on the Ulyssean soul,

Self-righted from the dreadful self-surrender,

returning to the world he was so imperially to master,

The circumnavigator of the soul.

¹ In *Studies in Philology*, vol. xxiii, April, 1926, Univ. of N. Carolina Press; London, Camb. Univ. Press.

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And still there haunts us the song of the elder poet:

Others abide our question, thou art free.
We ask and ask : Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge,

and Emerson's sudden surrender: "A good reader can, in a sort, nestle into Plato's brain, and think from thence; but not into Shakespeare's. We are still out of doors." It is a more arresting judgment than those passed by many worthy moralising scholars on the poet of the Sonnets, judgments on which we may now spare discussion.

Nor is the debate begun by Browning's fling at Wordsworth's

With this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart

worth reopening. Browning's "If so, the less Shakespeare he," comes from a poet who was always unlocking his own heart, and was actually doing so in the very poem in which he thus speaks. Swinburne's comment that so to do was not un-Shakespearean but was indeed un-Browning-like is as wide of the mark as its text. When all is said, we have immeasurably less of self-revelation from Shakespeare than from Wordsworth, and from Browning, and from Swinburne.

The more fitly may we end by recognition of the sheer poetic heritage which the Sonnets represent for us, and which is the lasting thing to dwell on. To claim for the master-poet some ninety-six, or possibly a round hundred, Sonnets which grade between the partly charming and the wholly fine, is surely to do better service to him and to literary history than to insist bibliolatrously on loading him with a whole miscellany of which many are unsuccessfully laboured, a number cacophonous, and some absurd. The end of poetry is the communication of rhythmic verbal beauty, in all modes of thought and feeling. If it be

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held that the master has really done work which is unbeautiful, let the case be faithfully made out; and if what has here been reckoned unbeautiful be held to be unjustly so ranked, let that in turn be argued. But merely to object, in the mandarin manner, against the "disintegration" of a miscellaneous text which no sound scholar ought ever to have accepted as authoritative, is not conducive to respect for authority.

In view of the amount of unreserved praise that has been bestowed throughout a period of a hundred years on the Sonnets as a whole, it is probably unnecessary now to defend them against criticism such as Pattison's, which arraigned them as generically inferior because of their abnegation of the Petrarchan form. That argument, if not dismissible as merely pedantic, is certainly fallacious. The concept "sonnet," once so loose as to include a multitude of verse-forms, latterly restricted so as to indicate but a few variations of a poem-form of fourteen lines, is not reasonably to be held as sacred to one arrangement of rhymes, any more than to be specially attachable to the odic manner and aim chiefly affected by Milton. The Shakespeare Sonnet, more often lyrical or elegiac than odic, is in its own way as truly artistic a thing as the Miltonic at its noble best, to say nothing of its sardonic worst. There is no inherent artistic value in a more intricate as against a less intricate arrangement of rhymes. Differing perfections are incommensurable. Nothing can be "better" than a first-rate Keats sonnet, or a first-rate Wordsworth sonnet; and at the same time nothing can be better than a first-rate Shakespeare Sonnet, like 73 or 107, or 116. Lyrical beauty is as consummate a thing as the odic, the elegiac, the idyllic, or the didactic. And Shakespeare's sonnet-form was well chosen, inasmuch as it yields a special lissomness of movement, never excelled before or since.

After much acute discussion on the purport of the

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antithetically used terms "classical" and "romantic," we get no further than this, that "romantic" broadly signifies a new (or an old-new) outlook on the aspects of life, expressed with some freshness of composition and phrasing. The new style may or may not be skilful: in the hastily written novels of Scott it is merely easy-going in its partial modernity; but it aims at being *relatively* natural. Such an impulse is seen in the sonnets of Sidney, and it affects the whole work of Shakespeare, who brought to his task an unexampled mastery of rhythm and diction. And this is in sum what we get in the Sonnets: a new naturalness of feeling and phrase, a new freedom and felicity of rhythm. At their best they are peculiarly unencumbered by style fashion and authority, and, being freely produced by a great poet, they are peculiarly beautiful, though not written for publication.

To argue, however, as some have done, that this, therefore, must have seemed in his eyes his greatest literary achievement, is but to impose one more arbitrary dictum on the process of appreciation. As no type of recognised sonnet is to be reckoned better than another in respect of mere form, so no form of sonnet is to be reckoned by reason of its structure a greater thing than great blank verse. There can be no intenser lyric loveliness than that of

Oh, Proserpina,
For the flowers now that, frightened, thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon . . . daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath—

an aria so beautiful that "the sense aches at it," at once the *cri du cœur* of Perdita and the poet, in nearly the last play of all. No rhymed arrangement of words,

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even in the ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE, can outgo the utter perfection of that rhymeless rhythm, where for once mythology is fused to sheer essential poetry. Let the Sonnets simply stand on their own feet, as they very well can, when we weed out the lame, the halt, and the blind.

They are a windfall for which the provoking Thorpe demands our thanks, over and above his grinning "immortality." To say with Hallam that it were to be wished Shakespeare had never written them is to be, for one thing, in spirit out of touch with Shakespeare, and to blench at doing what he perhaps of all great artists did in the fullest degree, to wit, the looking all life in the face. But the more grievous error, in the case of such a verdict by a historian of literature, is that of wishing away the richest casket of Elizabethan song. For here is a string of pearls of Proserpine, great and small, perfect and imperfect, salvaged, with a handful of other and poorer things, from the realm of Dis.

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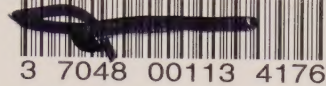
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